

The Mission Journal of *Cecilia Haut*

*Erika Knight*¹

MARCH 26, 1996

I am sitting in a hotel suite in Moscow. The airport lost our luggage, so we are going to stay here until they find it. Our total flight time was fifteen hours from Washington, D.C., to Moscow. Sister Akers, Elder Hadlock, and I slept most of the time to avoid the kissy movies being shown.

March 27, 1996

This morning we saw a grandmother, a *babushka*, at the hotel entrance sweeping with a twig broom. When we started to go outside, she said authoritatively in Russian: "It's cold. Go back in and put on a coat." We understood and put on our coats.

March 28, 1996

I am in my coupe on the train. Our luggage was recovered and nothing is missing. We have been watching all the villages go by. In Moscow, people live in Communist apartments. Out here, people live in little *dachas* that look like the little houses in West Virginia coal mining towns, except that they are painted bright red, deep blue, or green. We are also passing farms and rolling hills with a little snow. The train trip takes twenty hours.

March 29, 1996

Tonight we had an appointment with a family who forgot we were coming and had another couple over. They invited us in and gave us vodka, coffee, and chocolates. Sister Black explained that we don't drink vodka or coffee, but they just looked confused. "No, no, we insist. You are our guests." So we tried to be good guests with the vodka and coffee sitting

1. These passages from the extensive *Mission Journal of "Sister (Erika) Knight"* were selected and edited by Ruth Knight Bailey and Cherie K. Woodworth.

untouched in front of us. We told them about America and missionary work. In Russia, when you call someone "Sister" or "Brother," you use the person's first name, so they thought our first names were "Night" and "Black." He said, "Black, don't worry about the coffee. It is pure, clean, coffee with no spirits in it." They told us about themselves—the wife is a physics professor—and after a nice visit we let them have their Saturday night. We'll teach them another time.

Sunday, March 30, 1996

Ours is the only branch in this mission. We meet in a beautiful old building called "The Palace of Chemists." The chairs have needlepoint seats, the walls are the color of a Virginia forest, and the floors are hardwood. Classy. Lots of non-members attend. We have a native branch president, President Hasbulan. Sister Black plays the piano and Sister Robison leads the singing with her gorgeous opera voice. During the meeting, all I could think was, "Am I dreaming? Is this a Mormon meeting? Where is the basketball-court carpet?"

April 1, 1996

It is only my fourth day here and Sisters Black and Robison have had five new baptisms. Today four more people told us they want to be baptized.

I am too tired to write. Must sleep.

April 5, 1996

Today we passed out invitations to church. We also visited Natasha, a nineteen-year-old who is getting baptized. We played a Book of Mormon crossword puzzle with her and her little brother. When we walked home across town, it was dark. There are no street lights. The three of us locked arms, spoke no English, and had our mace ready. Actually, I felt very safe.

April 6, 1996

We don't do much tracting here, but we tried it today, and I was pleasantly surprised. We were invited in the first door. A husband and wife in their twenties asked us all kinds of religious questions. After two hours, they gave us a box of chocolates as we were leaving. We wrote a thank-you note and taped it on their door.

People tell us they are atheists or belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. One told us that the Orthodox Church was just big business and asked if ours was the same. One man asked how I, as a mathematician, could believe in God. In broken Russian I said, "I feel the spirit of God and I see God in other people." He wanted an invitation to church. One lady just wanted to sell us Herbal Life.

April 7, 1996, Sunday

Lots of people we met tracting came to church today. Members and visitors felt welcome. We walked people home afterward, so I felt useful.

April 10, 1996

I am exhausted after shopping in the open air market on the Don River. Things are organized by vendor instead of by product. You find fish, bleach, and makeup on the same table. I accidentally ate a piece of raw fish from a Korean street vendor. I knew raw fish was against mission rules, but didn't even know this was fish until Sister Robison kicked me. I hope I don't have a parasite.

We took a "taxi" home, that is we hitchhiked. Cars drive all over the road in four or five lanes, avoiding potholes, sometimes even going into oncoming traffic. Instead of stopping for pedestrians, the cars speed up and honk five or six times. Hoards of people are always crossing the street, so when it is muddy, cars splash mud on them.

We haven't had hot water for four days. Sisters Black and Robison boil water in metal buckets to bathe with, but I've been taking cold showers.

On the way to Ira's yesterday, Sister Black was quizzing me on the seven Russian verbs of the day. I tried to concentrate on the verbs instead of on the cold rain. An old *babushka* was on an out-of-the-way street trying to sell sunflower seeds. She was shivering and wet like me, trying to earn a living selling stupid sunflower seeds with no customers around. Tears started running down my face—I didn't want Sisters Black and Robison to see me, so I walked behind them. I used to make a fuss about which brand of yogurt Mom bought. People here eat things that are stale, sugary, or fatty, and they appreciate it.

Tithing is very difficult for most Russians. Missionaries are expected to have money left over after buying food and personal things. Greenie missionaries need to learn empathy and generosity, but we are not supposed to give money to people. We are supposed to pay our fast offerings. We need to be safe on the streets, so we can't carry lots of money and be known targets for muggers. I appreciate being here, but I am hungry and cold and can't talk. And then I cry because I should grow up, but can't do it all at once.

April 15, 1996

Today I discovered that some of the *doma* [houses] do not have bathrooms or running water. They have outhouses, and tenants carry water inside with buckets. I had wondered why the buckets.

Babushkas are important for healing people. Some heal only baptized people—any religion's baptism is acceptable—and the *babushkas* know somehow who has been baptized. Given the medical conditions, this may inspire people to ask us about baptism. Nobody sasses the *babushkas*.

April 18, 1996

Today we walked around Rostov visiting people who had not been to church lately. While walking, I thought about how the priesthood works here. I used to think priesthood was sexist, but used right, it does not need to be. We are given church callings to learn and to help others. Men seem more attracted to worldly power than most women. It's funny to call the priesthood a "power"—that probably attracts men—but really priesthood's power is in unselfishly building others, not controlling them. I think a lot of women know naturally about the power that builds up others. I don't mind giving men important titles if it attracts them to being more supportive of others. We are supposed to build up local leaders. Shadow leadership is powerful leadership.

April 19, 1996

Today we visited an Armenian Orthodox church. We have Russian Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox churches here. The priest came over to talk with us. I was glad we had worn *babushka* scarves on our heads. [A woman's head is always supposed to be covered in church.] The priest gave me a necklace. He said that it would protect me from the evil eye. He was very respectful to us, and I felt a good spirit there.

Graffiti here are hilarious—the writers are trying to write bad words in English and don't quite get it (e.g., "FOT YOU"). Teenagers love to practice English swear words on us. Russian swear words have four syllables while English swear words have only four letters, so it is easier to swear in English.

Sisters Black and Robison and I discussed what we can do to look more Russian so that people won't talk to us only because they are curious about America. Here is our plan:

1. Walk more slowly, arm-in-arm (all three of us) like Russian girls.
2. Speak softly and always speak Russian.
3. Kiss our female friends on the cheek when we see them.
4. Wear Russian dresses.

April 20, 1996

Today was Natalia Borchiva's baptism, performed by our zone leader. Standing in the shimmering emerald water with her wet, blond hair streaming down her back, Natasha looked absolutely radiant. Her mother, father, and little brother looked so proud. They love the church but don't believe in God, so it is not yet time for them to be baptized.

May 23, 1996

Today on the street, two little girls started following us, talking to me. One was pointing to herself and repeating her Russian words to make me understand. She was saying, "Wait! We believe . . . we believe in God!" I

gave them each an Articles of Faith card with a picture of Jesus and children. Sister Black gave them invitations to church and told them that we have meetings just for children and meetings for their parents, too. They smiled and smiled.

June 9, 1996, Sunday

My first official sacrament meeting talk was today. I was asked to speak just ten minutes before the meeting began, so I prayed for people to feel the Spirit even if they could not understand me. I spoke on spiritual truths compared to scientific truths—faith and the Holy Ghost compared to seeing and testing, and how things hoped for and not seen can turn into belief and even knowledge. Everyone was quiet (a rare sacrament meeting occurrence). I used simple words, and my talk was short. A *babushka*, named Sveta, on the front row, said the correct case endings to me out loud as I botched the language, so that I could correct myself as I went along. After the meeting, I was told that I have a beautiful accent, a beautiful smile, and it was a pleasure to hear me speak. I used to be afraid to speak Russian, but not anymore.

June 13, 1996

Tonight we taught English at the library. Sister Black went to the front of the room with the *babushkas* and children, and I was in the back with only good-looking men. I felt a little funny when the district leader came in to check on us. The men and I talked about how things were different under Communism. The university students said that in elementary school they had worn striped uniforms, like inmates. A man, about forty, said, “We had money, but there was nothing to buy.” There is no reward for working, even if you get paid, if there is nothing to buy. They all agreed that with Communism gone, the mafia runs things, as if there must be an oppressor, no matter what. They wanted to talk about the upcoming election and were curious about what I thought of the candidates. We’re not supposed to talk politics, so I told them I had no opinion. I did not tell them our mission home is bugged, but I’m sure it is.

July 11, 1996

Today we walked with a lady going to have an abortion at an abortion clinic. She told us that most women she knows have had fifteen or twenty abortions. This was her sixth abortion, and she is twenty-four. She had never heard of birth control pills. She had heard that in America hospitals are clean, that there are more people who want to adopt babies than there are babies to adopt. She loved her two-year-old more than anything and wished so much to give birth to the baby inside her.

A couple hours later, we saw her walking home with her two-year-old.

Her blouse was halfway untucked, her head was down, and she had mascara smears under her eyes.

In America, people can choose to be “pro-choice” or “pro-life,” and can judge people who disagree with them. What choice did this woman have? What kind of life? Many people here have no food. Women do not always have the choice to abstain from marital relations. There is little or no access to birth control. Orphanages do not always have formula for the babies. Sometimes mothers who want children see no choice but abortion, for the sake of the unborn child, and I cannot imagine how hard that would be. Why don’t Americans with strong feelings about abortion, for or against, get together and do something to help the women here?

July 31, 1996

The Market

It is forty degrees Centigrade outside [104 degrees Fahrenheit]. Flies everywhere. On one table is a pile of pigs-legs with hooves and fur. At some tables the dead animal’s eyes look at you, and you can have the piece cut off that you want. Nothing is refrigerated. We don’t buy meat in the market, but we do buy cheese. Tvorog cottage cheese is the best. Sister Yakobikova told me how to make it with nylon stockings and sour whole milk. People sell flowers from their gardens, which I buy every week. The flowers are like bread to me. Kvass, a drink made from black bread, is sold out of a tank, like milk. Sometimes I buy a glass—it’s not against mission rules although it tastes sinful.

August 1, 1996

Viktor, a doctor to be baptized August 25, wrote a sacrament meeting talk showing that there are many paths to God, and all bring people to the same God. We didn’t know how to tell him not to stand in sacrament meeting and say that Buddha is Heavenly Father, so we discussed his excellent points until we narrowed things down to Christianity and to the restoration. It had to be done, but I really enjoyed his insights about other religions.

August 12, 1996

Tonight, a mother and father we met on the streets fixed a beautiful Russian dinner for us—and Vladim, their twenty-three-year-old son! Only three places were set at the table, but I insisted they sit with us. They wanted to know if I had a boyfriend and about marriage. After we’d taught the first two principles of the first discussion, they changed the conversation to American food. Did we eat “gamboorgeers and cheeps”? When we left, Vladim walked us home!

August 20, 1996

Today Sister Robison and I took Svetlana, who was scheduled to be

baptized Sunday, to President Siwachok's office for her abortion interview. Something happened, and she came out crying. Everyone has abortions here—it must have been more than that. A few weeks ago Svetlana bore a strong testimony, but she also said something about having a spiritual gift and wanting television cameras at her baptism. President postponed her baptism and did not tell us why.

August 23, 1996

We had a first discussion with Seventh-day Adventists who read the Bible every Friday night. We gave them Books of Mormon, and we read Moroni, chapter 7, about faith, hope, and charity. They loved it. They know the Bible better than I do and are respectful of our church.

September 18, 1996

I haven't been keeping up my journal writing, but here are some highlights:

*Last Monday, I ate cow's tongue for dinner at someone's house.

*A family whose house was bombed in Chechenya has moved here and is getting baptized next week. The government has not given them money, and they are having a hard time.

*I love this. The church has sent tons of wooden crates in on the train—food, blankets, clothes.

*Our investigators Seriozha, Lena, and Rustom call us every evening to be sure we are home safely. Last time, Rustom, the ten-year-old, asked us if we had said our prayers yet.

*We have church members from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, and Russia, of course. I love the dancing and the food. My favorite food is Armenian. All these people have such strong love for their home countries. Their languages and cultures are sacred and painful to leave.

*I have started wearing Russian dresses—some elders are jealous of my comfortable dresses and cross-country running sandals. I'd hate to wear a tie, pants, and dress shoes every day.

September 26, 1996

Tonight we taught Stepan and Iraniewee the law of chastity. Sister Robison finished with chastity, and it was my turn to talk about the Word of Wisdom. Something was bothering Stepan, so I paused and asked how he thought living the law of chastity helps people. Staring me down, he said the law of chastity does help people, but he won't live it the way Sister Robison said. In front of his wife, he said it is okay to have sex with other women if they are good friends. There are single women who want children, and he is going to help them. I looked at beautiful Iraniwee as her eyes filled with tears, and she looked into her lap. I asked Stepan how he thought Iraniwee felt about this. He liked her, he said, but he would di-

voiced her and no one else would marry her. Iraniwee is beautiful and intelligent. I said something about love in families and added that Iraniwee was bright and beautiful. Stepan gave me a satan stare and said that all families do not turn out the way they are supposed to. Iraniwee was infertile, and he wanted children of his own blood. He started to give us an earful about neighborhood prostitutes, and I interrupted to tell him that he could talk about this to President Siwachok if he wanted to. He said he would and went to get a watermelon from the kitchen they share with the neighbors. I hugged Iraniwee as she cried. She wants children, too. Their marriage was arranged in Armenia. She likes it very much when we come over.

President has told us not to get mixed up in people's family problems, to turn things over to him. So I called him and told him Stepan would visit him.

September 27, 1996

With our Seventh-day Adventist group, we sang songs and taught the fifth discussion about loving God, loving each other, fasting, and tithing. Their teachings are very similar to ours. They have been attending their meetings on Saturday and ours on Sunday. Olya read the whole Doctrine and Covenants and loved it. All twelve have read the Book of Mormon and loved it. We are not trying to baptize them, but are sharing our beliefs. It will be sad to finish giving them the discussions. I hope they keep coming to church. What good people.

September 30, 1996

Seriozha, Lena, and Rustom are to be baptized on October 27. Tonight, we gave Rustom a Russian copy of "For the Strength of the Youth" and talked about having high standards, self esteem, good friends, and honesty. They loved the little book, but something was bothering Seriozha. He was not worthy to be baptized, he told us, because he is not honest. All three of them live on less than half of what I do, and I don't pay rent. They live in one room, sometimes without enough to eat. Seriozha has been building them a little house in the country by taking extra money from his boss, and no one knows. Though it's wrong, he needs the money for food and doesn't know if he can stop. If he tells the boss, he will lose the little half-built house and maybe his job. He is desperate and suffering. He sees dishonest people with enough food, nice clothes, and cars. At the end of our discussion, he prayed and thanked Heavenly Father that the people at work like him. He asked Heavenly Father to help him work hard enough that they would pay him more money. I have never heard a more sincere prayer. It's hard to hear that such good people have lost faith in themselves.

October 1, 1996

Today while we were teaching a first discussion to a wonderful family

that looked like natural leaders, the two-year-old got restless. The father put the child on his lap and showed him naked pictures in *Playboy* magazine. When the father passed him over to the mother, she kept flipping through the Playboy pages to keep him quiet. Aiee!

October 3, 1996

At my monthly interview, President asked about our investigators. My companion and I have more exceptional people committed to baptism than most full districts in a month or even three months.

"Are you just going to baptize a bunch of women?" President asked.

"They are all families, President."

"Oh, women with children?"

"No, President. They are all families with both mothers and fathers." He looked surprised as if no sister missionary ever found a man who wanted to join the church. Then he asked, "Sister Knight, why aren't you married?"

"I'm only twenty-two. I am on a mission."

He smiled. "Sister Knight, are you going to be completely submissive to your husband?"

Assuming I'll marry someone who respects women and will be equally submissive to me, I answered, "Yes." He leaned back and laughed. I know President likes to tease, but I am wearing thin on this man thing. I feel disrespected. We are not allowed to street contact women, only men with women or men with children. Fine. I want to sustain my mission leaders, and, if it's men they want, I will find men. I just want women treated with respect. Women have earned it, especially Russian women.

October 11, 1996

Tonight was our last discussion with the Seventh Day Adventists. They will try to come to our church and baptisms when they can. Egar got the highest mark possible on both of his seminary exams. He has been called to pastor their church here in Rostov.

October 12, 1996

Today was an embarrassing no-show. Ira and Auton said they wanted to be baptized in November. We heard that Ira does not want to pay tithing, even though we have not given them the tithing discussion yet. We got to the house to find a note saying they were sorry they missed us, but that they had to go pick up their son Anton at school. I wrote them a note back. It takes me a long time to write notes in Russian because I sound out the words and then re-copy in my best handwriting. Just as I started to stick the note on the door with a smiley-face sticker, Anton opened it with a soccer ball in his arm. He looked embarrassed and said he would get his mother. She said she just got back from school five minutes ago. Of course, we had

been there writing for twenty minutes. She had heard us knock at 5:00. I said that since she had just gotten home, she would probably like to eat, and we would see her on Sunday. She seemed so embarrassed that we just let it go.

October 13, 1996

Perfect day. All twelve of our people who are committed to baptism came to church. Fathers and mothers in each family came. Every seat was full.

October 20, 1996

Today we had a special temple conference for all five Rostov groups. None of our members have been through the temple. Our first temple trip will be in two weeks in Stockholm. All the speakers were people going to the temple for the first time. They talked about eternal families, being worthy, and receiving blessings.

When I got home from the conference, I had lipstick marks all over my cheeks from the kisses.

October 22, 1996

Today a general authority came to speak to all the missionaries. Sister Didier spoke first, telling us about how she joined the church at eighteen and served a mission at twenty-one. She counseled us to create an atmosphere of love and encouragement. "You are starting a church here." Sister Didier is strikingly beautiful, and she inspired me so much. I want to be like her and come back to Russia some day with my husband. Maybe as mission presidents.

October 29, 1996

Seriozha, Lena, and Rustom were scheduled to be baptized last Sunday, but we had to postpone it. When we met with them this afternoon, both father and mother were tipsy from alcohol. We pretended not to notice and talked about the thirteenth article of faith—being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and doing good. They loved the discussion, yet seemed so helpless to reach for it.

October 31, 1996

This morning we attended a terrible zone conference. President always addresses us as "brethren" with no mention of sisters. I have always included myself in "brethren," but today it was worse. President said we can now only go to baptisms if we are immersing the investigators. Sister Robison asked if we could go to the baptism if we taught the investigator being baptized, and President said, "No!" If not actually baptizing, we needed to be out working, not sitting around at a baptism. As a sister missionary, I

began feeling upset. Then President spoke about priesthood, not mentioning the sisters. Here are some direct quotes from his talk:

“Through the priesthood you hold, you bring people to Christ.”

“Priesthood is at the head of the church.”

“‘Missionary’ is a priesthood calling.”

“This is the only church with the priesthood. That makes us different.”

“Priesthood is the organization of the church.”

I started telling myself that President was talking to me, too. I have this calling. I act in God’s name. I bring people to Christ. I serve. . . . I looked over at Sister Robison. Sitting perfectly straight on the front row, she was fuming. Her face looked tense, and she fidgeted with her pen instead of taking notes—very unlike Sister Robison.

Afterwards, Sister Siwachok came to see if Sister Robison was okay. She was not okay, she said. The conference was one-sided, and she could not talk to the president about it. Sister Siwachok offered to talk to her, but President came in while we were talking.

I left to talk to him, leaving Sister Robison with Sister Siwachok. I didn’t mince words. I told him we feel disrespected always focusing on men—finding men, teaching men, and holding the priesthood. President surprised me. He listened respectfully then quietly said he had heard that some day women may have the priesthood, but not yet. Until then, we need to find male priesthood holders to open branches in this mission. He genuinely complimented my missionary work and told me to keep it up. I asked him if I could go to the baptisms of my investigators. He said yes.

This afternoon I witnessed the most frightening thing I have ever seen. Sisters Robison, Ward, and I were coming out of a store when we heard a terrible thump. We turned to see a white Volga stopped in the road next to the trolley tracks. To the left of the car, a man, maybe in his late thirties, was lying on the tracks. Many people were walking and driving by, but no one stopped to help. It was too late to help anyway.

I stopped. I did not want to look at him, but I looked. We needed to keep walking with everybody else because we had a first discussion at 5:00 and it was 4:48. I tried to walk, but something came over me. Even though I was not there last year when Dad was hit by the car, I saw the whole thing in my mind today. Every part of my body froze. I lost touch with everything around me and could see nothing but a blur.

Then the blur finally cleared. The man’s body was still lying there in the rain and mud. Why didn’t someone move his body or at least cover it? People crossed the tracks and acted as if nothing had happened. I wanted to move the body myself, to show respect for this life that had ended. It was getting dark and raining hard. Four or five trolleys were backed up until finally some people got off and picked up the body. I thought they would move him inside, out of the rain or into a car, but instead they just moved him between the trolley tracks. His head was maybe six inches from the

track, and the trolleys sped by in both directions. No ambulance came. No police came for a long while. No one covered his body. No one stood by him. It got dark and his body was covered with mud and rain.

We missed our discussion. Sister Ward and Sister Robison did not make me leave. It was as if Dad were near me.

November 2, 1996

Sister Ward and I are to be transferred to a new area in the west with few church members. There are brand new, huge houses, and BMWs, Mercedes, Range Rovers, and Jeeps. I've heard the only way to have much money in Russia is dishonestly—through the mafia.

November 12, 1997

I said goodbye to investigators and friends. Genadi and Lena made a beautiful goodbye dinner for me. The whole time I felt I was going to cry. I hate transfers.

November 29, 1996

We went introducing ourselves to our neighbors. Big mafia-money houses. I am curious and afraid to see who lives in these big, three-story houses with private gates and German cars when for most Russians, the economy is worse than in 1930s' America.

At the biggest house, we pushed the button at the gate. A video camera clicked on, and we heard, "Who's there?" Sister Bogdonova said we were missionaries who would like to make their acquaintance. Surprisingly, the woman said she would come down. As the gate opened, a beautiful dark woman introduced herself. I asked her about God, and she said, "Without God it is impossible to live." Though she was very friendly, a tall, dark man came into the background, listening. He looked like a mafia man in the movies. We invited them to church and quickly left.

December 1, 1996

Today Natasha, Maxim, and Dennis were baptized. They saved up and bought white socks to wear with their baptismal clothing.

December 17, 1996

Olya, a church member, is seven months pregnant. Her sister is a missionary in Moscow. When Olya refused to have an abortion, her husband left her. Now she stays with her father, but her father will not give her money. Being proud, she did not tell anyone, and she has not been to a doctor. When we told President Siwachok, he paid for Olya to go. The doctor said the baby might die before birth because of Olya's poor diet of bread and potatoes. Olya is so alone and scared, and now she must go to the hospital for a month.

Last night on the telephone, in her shaky voice, Olya said, "It is not a bad sickness," as if trying to comfort herself. I told her how brave and strong she was in not having an abortion, but she is in no position to care for a baby. I am terrified to imagine myself in her position—I could not sleep all night.

At 8:00 this morning, I called to see if we could take Olya to the hospital. Her father said she had left alone at 5:00 a.m. to take the bus to the hospital. But the bus does not go to that hospital, and she has no money. Pregnant Olya walked all the way in the cold and dark. Her father said that Olya was stupid; he said he had one good daughter and one bad daughter, and he wanted no part in helping the bad one. He doesn't know where she is, doesn't care, and won't visit her. Yet he is Olya's only family. In Russian hospitals, families must bring food, clothing, and bedding for the patients. I asked him for Olya's full name, so I could find her at the hospital. He did tell me.

For gospel study, I read the Relief Society manual's Word of Wisdom chapter about vitamins—what foods have which vitamins and what they do. Then I made the right foods for Olya. In our biggest pan, I cooked two bags of shell noodles with kidney beans, corn, parsley, cheese, onions, ground meat, and tomatoes, which filled six jars. I put carrot sticks, apples, and oranges into a bag. Also, a box of milk, extra vitamins, a loaf of banana bread, and church magazines.

It was hard to find Olya's hospital, and when we did, she looked awful, so skinny and pale. She looked at the ground and talked about repentance. We asked her what medicine she needed because President will pay for it. "The baby is alive," she said smiling, then wrote a list of medications she needed. I pulled a jar of food from my bag. The beans and parsley have iron, I told her, and so do the vitamin pills. I had to show her how to take the vitamins, and she began to cry. She had heard of vitamin pills, but had never seen any. She said she couldn't take them because they are expensive and that I needed them. In America, I told her, they really are cheap. Besides, I have more. Eat slowly, we said, and only a little at first.

December 18, 1996

Olya told us that she tried eating slowly, but in the middle of the night she ate more and more until it was all gone. I can't imagine how one tiny girl could eat all that, but she did. I want to take food to her every day.

December 25, 1996

Christmas—Today is a regular working day in Russia. Russians celebrate Christmas on January 7. Since today was preparation day, we did our usual shopping and cleaning. People still sell food outside in the snow: oranges and eggs frozen solid. My *sharma* [Armenian bread stuffed with meat] froze today while I was eating it. *Uzhas!* [How awful!] At home, my

bootlaces were frozen, so I had to light the oven and defrost my feet in it before I put the groceries away. This afternoon, we had a Christmas party at the mission home and watched *Fiddler on the Roof*. The package and cards from Mom and the ward in Virginia made it feel like Christmas. Many missionaries didn't receive packages because their families had been told that packages could not get through. I was glad to have something to share.

The Rostov and Volgograd members just returned from their first temple trip in Sweden. They rode the train for thirty-six hours to St. Petersburg, then stayed with members for a few days. Then they took a bus to the coast, then a ship to Sweden. Five families were sealed for eternity, and they stayed two weeks to do as many temple sessions as possible. The church gave each adult six pair of garments. All the branch presidents went too. When I arrived in the mission field, there was only one branch. Now there are five. Natalya Nosonova, from the north, received her mission call to Moscow. She is the first missionary from the Rostov mission, but there will be many, many more.

Elderly Russians are not receiving their "social security" pensions and are starving. Last week, I saw a beautiful little *babushka* digging through the garbage. From a broken jar, she started eating some gook. I walked past, then had to go back. I gave her ten thousand rubles (two dollars)—enough to buy seven or eight loaves of bread. She stood tall, and said she could not accept it. Tears formed in both our eyes. I put the money into her pocket and walked away.

December 30

We are teaching the Goshanokas and their two children. They contacted us after seeing something on television about the church, and they wanted to have family home evening and sing and pray together. In Soviet times, the state was the idol people were supposed to worship, and it did not feel right to most people. I am beginning to understand how wonderful it would be to be allowed to believe in God after years of Soviet rule.

January 1, Sunday

Ararat, an Armenian, teaches Gospel Essentials half in Russian and half in Armenian. Armenians understand Russian, but they don't want to speak it now that they don't have to. Some Russians went inactive when so many Armenians joined the church here. Nobody speaks about the tension, but sometimes it's there.

January 7, 1997

Russian Christmas Day. Today we had no appointments. President Siwachok told us not to stay home, but to go meet people. I didn't want to intrude on their holiday. I really didn't want to, but I did. I think President

knew and didn't tell us—nearly everyone all day invited us into their homes! They gave us tea, sweet rolls, *varialee*, fruit, and candy. They even wanted to know about Christ! It was like trick-or-treating! I came home with my scripture bag stuffed with goodies. Here, the main Christmas present children receive is candy. So the toothbrushes from our dentist in Virginia were great presents to go with the candy. Really, just perfect.

January 8, 1997

You should see the outdoor market! It was -22 degrees Celsius, snowing and icy and everything is being sold as usual, on top of the snow and ice. I guess there really isn't some place to just go inside. People pull their food and kids around on little sleds. They wrap kids under four in blankets and lay them on the sleds where they can't move.

The people selling the food must get really cold. They have to take their gloves off to count the money. There are some vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers that shouldn't be sold frozen because when they thaw, they don't taste good. Here is what the sellers did: They wrapped the tomatoes and cucumbers in big blankets inside barrels. In the barrels there were one liter Pepsi bottles with warm water in them, keeping the tomatoes at room temperature. Every once in a while a *babushka* would come with a new Pepsi bottle with warm water in it from home. They kept one frozen cucumber and one frozen tomato out on top of the blanket for display, so people would know what was inside the barrel.

I was very happy to find fresh vegetables.

Sometimes the things people say to sell things are really funny. Almost everyone you walk by yells something at you and at everyone. Here are some of the things I heard today:

"*Kto zabył mandarinny? Kto zabył? . . .*"

"Who forgot to buy mandarin oranges? Who forgot? Who forgot to buy mandarin oranges? Who forgot? Who forgot to buy . . ."

"*Kto ustal ot tarakanov? . . .*"

"Who is tired of cockroaches? Who is tired of cockroaches? Who is tired of cockroaches? Who is tired of cockroaches? . . ."

"*Dyevuski! Goriachie chebureki!*"

"Girls! Hot chebureki! Girls! Hot chebureki! Girls! Hot chebureki!"

There aren't any signs or anything. If you need to walk fast, you might miss what you're looking for, but you can just listen for it instead. I've seen some blind shoppers out in the market. They probably really like it because you don't have to see to know what's being sold.

January 17, 1997

I get joy feeding chicken bones to twenty or so stray cats living underneath our apartment. They gobble the bones and growl at each other, being so very hungry. Sometimes I carry the bones inside my scripture bag—

which my companions think is funny. Last week we gave a cardboard box and an old shirt to a cat about to have kittens.

Olya, who is two weeks from her due-date, called today and said she must give her baby up for adoption. She really appreciated the baby clothes the church sent from Virginia. She is hoping to find an American family like the missionaries who will be able to care for her baby. She cried and cried. Her five-year-old daughter is who-knows-where with her father. I've asked Mom to try to find someone in America who would love Olya's baby and could fly to Russia. President Siwachok will help.

January 22

I got pickpocketed today! 500,000 rubles! Almost \$100. Someone saw me take my money out to buy food (as senior companion I was carrying the grocery money for all three of us). I bought some carrots and put my money into my coat pocket. The man came up beside me and asked the seller how much the carrots cost, and five seconds later I put my hand in my pocket and all the money was gone.

THE FIRST TWO THINGS I AM GOING TO DO
WHEN I GO BACK TO AMERICA:

1. Wash clothes in a washing machine (I can hardly wait!).
2. *Drive* to the grocery store in bad weather, go *inside* and put my food into a *cart*. Luxury. I shouldn't be so sour. I really don't mind the frozen, snowy market. I appreciate the food—it's just that I hate being pickpocketed.

January 24, 1997

Today is my one-year mark. It doesn't seem that long.

January 28, 1997

Today we volunteered at the hospital. The elders helped build a small Orthodox chapel near the hospital so priests can bless those who are dying.

February 14, 1997

Dyedushka [Grandfather] asked to be baptized. He is the only elderly person attending our branch. His name is Yurii, but we call him Dyedushka. He's a retired heart surgeon, and everyone loves him.

Many sick missionaries have had to finish their missions in America. Hospitals here are full, and people have to find hospitals in other cities. A fourteen-year-old girl, a friend of several of our teenagers, just died of a high fever from the flu. I brought some aspirin with me—I wish I had known this girl needed my aspirin.

Vera was just diagnosed with breast cancer. Her family has no money for pain killers, let alone surgery. I hope the church will help her. The gov-

ernment won't. Anotoly has a tumor on the back of his head. He has a good wife and two teenage daughters. I fear for both Vera and Anotoly as well as their families.

People at church have been wearing scarves around their mouths to avoid getting viruses. Winter and sickness in Russia go together, and when people get sick, they can't just call 911. Sometimes they just die. The television program *Rescue 911* is shown here, dubbed in Russian. It is very, very popular—I keep getting asked if Americans can really just call to get immediate medical, fire, or police help.

February 19, 1997

People don't have enough food. I have heard little children whisper to their parents for bread. A loaf of bread costs the equivalent of twenty cents, which is difficult for people to come up with. Many haven't received paychecks for months. Rent is about forty dollars a month, and they can't pay it. When their paychecks do come, an entire family usually has about fifty or sixty dollars. We are not supposed to, but it is so tempting to give them money. All we can do as missionaries is pay generous fast offerings, which the local leaders spread around amazingly well. Loaves and fishes. We have more food back home in our pantry than the whole market here.

I got three packages at church on Sunday, thanks to Mom's e-mail friends and the ward in Virginia!!! I gave mini-Snickers bars to everyone, which they ate during church. Olya loved the American baby clothes Mom's friends sent. Her baby is darling, and she wants so much to keep her.

February 28, 1997

Yousuf and Rita couldn't prove they were legally married. They had wedding pictures, but no papers. We feared maybe they couldn't be baptized, but President said the church has different understandings of what legally married means, and they were married in Azerbaijan, papers or no.

March 2, 1997

Today on the street, a woman started talking to us. Her husband said, "Let's go," but she clearly didn't want to and kept talking. Suddenly he kicked her viciously in the shins then slapped her so hard she nearly fell. He said when he says come, she is to come. She nervously laughed like the embarrassment was worse than the pain. I couldn't believe my eyes. He did this in front of everyone on the street. Vodka must have a lot to do with this. And that women have no rights. Men at church are all kinder and gentler. I hope the church has something to do with it.

April 25, 1997

Yousuf did something so . . . cute . . . tonight. He's been struggling to

break his drinking and smoking habits, and we've been trying to help by leaving notes and gum and just plain love and encouragement. Tonight he re-decided to absolutely stop drinking vodka and to repent completely. He walked determinedly to the cupboard in their one-room-no-kitchen apartment and took out bread and boiled drinking water. He tore the bread in pieces, poured water into a cup, and put both on a table in front of us. Russian people eat bread and tea all the time, so I wasn't thinking much until Yousuf opened the scriptures and started to bless the sacrament! He was repenting by taking the sacrament. I bit my lip so hard it bled, trying not to smile. I gently said he should take the sacrament after baptism on Sundays. It was so sweet.

April 26, 1997

Today Vika was baptized. I gave her a bouquet of tulips.

Rostov-na-Donu has a new rule that churches other than Russian Orthodox cannot meet in public buildings. We have five branches now, and three have been meeting in public buildings. Where do we go?

May 7, 1997

Lena, Zhenia, and their seven children took Olya and her baby Diana to live with them so that Olya can keep her baby. Olya's father was so moved by this that he is about to be baptized. Soon Olya will work in the meat market, and he will tend his granddaughter.

May 20, 1997

Sister Siwachok told us how her husband Vladimir was born in southern Ukraine as one of seven children. He had only one pair of pants, and when his mother washed them, he had to hide. When Vladimir was six, German soldiers invaded. A hundred families fled to avoid being killed. They trekked through Europe with horses and buggies, but the family was captured and taken to a German labor camp. Germans considered Ukrainians to be Russians, and Russians were enemies. In the prison camp there were twenty families per room, and each person received just one bowl of radish broth and one piece of bread each day. A German lady would occasionally sneak a sandwich to Vladimir's mother, which she hid under her shirt until she could feed her seven children. She would give each child a piece. Once when Vladimir was working in the field, he saw a line of tanks coming and was sure he was about to die. But as the tanks came closer, he saw children running behind and soldiers throwing candy. They were Americans! The Americans eventually took the Siwachoks to New York City. Vladimir thought he was in heaven. Now I understand President Siwachok a little better. With his rough start, he is now a great mission president, who has strengthened people and earned the respect of the Russian government.

President Smoot, the new General Relief Society president, and President Busher of the Seventy came to speak to all of our presidencies. It was so good for our leaders, who are brand new members themselves. It would be frightening to be baptized for only six months and be made Relief Society president or branch president, but that is what happens here.

Also this week something sad happened. Remember how I told you that Anatoly, the second councilor in our branch presidency, had a tumor at the back of his head last winter? The cancer got worse, and the doctors sent Anatoly home to die. Anatoly has two teenage daughters. I remember what this is like. I remember what people in Virginia did for us when Dad was dying.

I made casserole and salad and banana bars and took it to their house. I met the family standing in the door being strong, like our family was strong. His wife, Svetlana, started crying. She told me she did not think she could live without him. He was only forty-six, like Dad.

Anatoly died suddenly at 4:00 a.m. the next morning. They had thought that they would have still at least a few months with him.

Anatoly's funeral was on P-day, two days later, and we went. Russian people usually die at home, and since there is no funeral home, people gather at the house. When we arrived, there was a big wooden Russian Orthodox cross by the door with Anatoly's name, birthday, and death date. People inside all wore black and were crying. No one was talking. Anatoly's body was lying on the bathroom door which had been taken off the hinges and set on two kitchen chairs. He was wearing a suit with a white shirt and tie. The weather was really hot and his body had already started decomposing. Anatoly's ears were blue. I don't know how to explain it—it was not horrifying; it simply didn't look like normal skin anymore.

His wife was sitting by him, touching him and crying. She wore all black and had a black *babushka* scarf over her head. Her lips were moving; she was speaking to him as she cried and moved her head from side to side. Her eyes were swollen and she looked as though she had not slept for the whole two and a half days that Anatoly had been dead. Each person who came to the house brought flowers. His daughters put all the flowers in water.

When it was time to go to the burial, the elders brought a big crate, with red fabric stapled to it, into the room where Anatoly was. Some of the family members and friends scooped Anatoly's body off the door into the crate. The men carried the crate down the steps of the apartment building and outside. The crate was open, with no top. On the way out the door, Svetlana tied a little scarf around my arm like the scarves around the arms of the men carrying Anatoly. She handed me a huge armful of flowers and told me to drop them. I didn't know what she meant and just followed her down the steps and outside with the flowers. Family members had also filled Anatoly's coffin with flowers.

Down the street a ways there was a bus for all of us to ride to the graveyard. The men with the armbands lifted Anatoly's body. Someone pushed me in front of the coffin and told me to drop the flowers on the way to the bus. Then I understood what I was supposed to do. I dropped one flower at a time on the ground in front of the men carrying the coffin. The whole funeral procession followed behind me and walked on the flowers that I had dropped until there was a long path of pressed flowers leading from Anatoly's home.

There was an opening in the back of the bus through which the men slid Anatoly's body. We rode the bus to the cemetery. When we got to the end of the graveyard where the new graves were, we all got off the bus. The men carried Anatoly's coffin to one of the open graves and set it onto a pile of dirt nearby. One of the shirtless grave diggers jumped into the grave and shoveled around the edges. Our branch president began the service. People were invited to share things that they loved about Anatoly at church, at work, and from the family. They were not prepared talks. President Siwachok made some final comments and there was a prayer. Then a shirtless grave digger jumped up out of the grave and another one brought a lid for the coffin and nailed it on. The men then lowered the coffin down into the grave with ropes. Everyone threw handfuls of dirt down into the grave, and then the grave diggers shoveled the rest of the dirt into the grave until it was full. They put the wooden cross at the head of the grave. When this was done, the grave was dedicated. We all walked back to the bus and went back to Svetlana's house where we went our separate ways.

I have lapsed in writing. With less than two months left on my mission, I am having a hard time staying focused on my journal. I honestly don't remember much from before my mission. I feel like I have always lived in Russia. I don't know if I will fit in in America anymore, and I don't know if I want to.

July 6, 1997

I am on the train, trying to remember my thoughts as I woke this morning.

Living in Russia has been like having a little lifetime inside another life. In coming to Rostov na Donu, I felt I was being born into a new world. I depended upon my companions to prepare strange, new food for me and to take me wherever I needed to go. Then I became a cute little *dyevushka* [girl]. People at church encouraged me in my babbling like a baby. They loved my wonder and awe as I experienced their world so new to me. They hugged me and patted my head.

As my Russian developed, my companions gave me jobs to do, and sometimes I thought I knew more than they did—better ways of teaching, serving, and so on. When they wanted to show me how to light the stove, I

thought I could do it myself. I burned off my eyelashes and eyebrows. Pretty soon though, it was like I was a college student. I was taking language tests and living with a companion from the Czech Republic. We weren't quite grown up, but we managed to learn to get along and work together.

The 'marriage' phase came the second time Sister Robison and I were companions. We were equals, and it was wonderful. We worked successfully, learning to communicate as companions, manage our money, and share household tasks. We worked on our relationship as mature people.

Child rearing sneaked up on me. In addition to being a companion and a student, I took on major church callings and heavy responsibilities. After teaching and counseling all day, shadowing the Relief Society president and other new leaders, and volunteering at the schools and the hospital, I did not think I could do one more thing. It was then that I was given greenies as new "babies" of my own! I loved helping new people make their way in the new world of the gospel and the new world of Russia. I was so sad when I lost a "baby" to America (when one of my new trainees insisted on going back), but I was so happy to see the confidence and competence of missionaries I had trained. I loved helping my new members build stronger families and serve others through church programs. I nearly quit writing in my journal because I did not have time to think in the language I had used before this Russian life.

Then one day I looked in the mirror and saw a *babushka*. My dress was worn out. My hair was thin. My joints hurt. I looked older and was so tired. At church, new beautiful missionaries arrived, and members gave them all the attention. I was a little jealous. I was not a cute little *dyevushka* to them anymore. I was Russian, and I was old. I really grandmothers the last two greenies and enjoyed them more. I watched my grown-up "children" training their own less experienced 'children,' and I was proud. I'd order people to go put on a coat, and they would obey me! I was more patient with people; I just wanted to love the people in my Rostov, because I knew I was about to leave them and I didn't want to. Rostov was home. I didn't want to go back to the place I had been before, and I worried so much about the members, hoping they would be okay without me.

My funeral came yesterday. The Russian members—my family—gathered at the train station to say goodbye. Through tears, I was pulled away to return to the life I have forgotten. Now here I am, on a bunk in the train car. I remember only Rostov, and it is gone.

I try to imagine resurrection. I remember Dyedushka telling me, "I wish I were your age, knowing what I know now." Now I think, "Dyedushka, I have been given your wish! I get to take the wisdom of a lifetime learned in your Russia. In America, I will get a hair cut, buy a new dress, and rest. Then suddenly I will be only twenty-two again, with my whole life ahead of me.

I try to imagine friends and family meeting me at the airport in Virginia. I don't remember their faces, but they'll look familiar. Reaching out, they will say, "Welcome home, thou good and faithful servant. You have completed the mission you were sent to accomplish."