

"Tell them the planet is glad they were born."



Maria with some of her 80 regular art students from 7 orphanages.

by Jan Thatcher Adams

Jan Thatcher Adams M.D. recently retired from 25 years of family practice. She is clinical professor in the Department of Family Practice and Community Health, University of Minnesota Medical School, and was the Whole Health Editor of The EDGE for several years. These are excerpt from articles written after her three different visits of the "Peace Clowns." Jan is also President of the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Maria's Children.

Some things about winter in Russian cities don't change -- the endless gray days, the harsh, fume-filled air, the dingy buildings and Stalinist era block architecture. Life is hard here, and getting harder. Democracy and capitalism have meant, for the average person, an unprecedented poverty in the midst of stores jammed with western goods. Violence has shifted from state-sponsored to Russian mafia and routine criminal activity. The average life span for the Russian male is 56 years--in St. Petersburg, it's 51 years. One Russian friend tells me that Americans, because they are so fortunate and spend their lives in the pursuit of material wealth, have lost track of their souls. "We Russians are married to death. We know how to stay with our souls."

Russia is a culture where, for as long as anyone alive can remember, daily survival is a struggle and a miracle. It is no surprise, then, that some horrors are just too much to deal with, and this has been the case with Russia's orphan population. The

orphanages are crammed with unwanted children, living a truly brutal existence, in a society where they are non-persons, and can never be citizens or expect any of the comforts of the Russian world. They cannot attend university, partly because their education is substandard. They cannot drive a car, or leave the country. If they survive to sixteen, they are given a nook in a six-person, two-room apartment, a job in a shoe factory, and sent out on the street. Most become prostitutes, an occupation they are all well trained for in their upbringing, and most will become thieves.

Maria Yeliseyeva, a woman of deep soul and intrepid determination, decided to change this paradigm. She began to take orphans daily from the orphanage, teach them to do art, model life skills, and coach them in behavior. She enlisted the help of her friends, both in Russia and in America. A foundation was begun to support her work.

With her own four children and her husband in a one bedroom apartment, she took orphans in every weekend, and now, with great effort, has managed to initiate a foster care program in Russia--a concept new to Russian society. So now, she has added a fifth child, one of two orphans fostered out.

The large murals created by the orphans are superb folk art, and the sale of cards and murals and calendars supports her ongoing work. This year, while the American clowns were in Moscow, there was a gala art opening of the orphan's work at the Central Institute of Artists, complete with wide media coverage and two rock concerts. Such a thing--the recognition of anything orphan

as worthwhile--would have been impossible just a few years ago. A few weeks later, as the clowns prepared to return home, we were at the airport in St. Petersburg. A man approached me and asked if we were the Peace Clowns (what the Russians have come to call us--we have a lot of media coverage each time we go to Russia).

Maria Yeliseyeva? I want to meet her, and talk to her.” Who could have imagined a woman would become famous in Russia for working with orphans?

Perhaps the story of Elena best illustrates the shifting paradigm. Elena is our tour guide in Moscow for the last three years. During Soviet times, she was an Intourist guide, a privileged position in that society, granted to good Communists. As such, she did not see orphans.

But our tour has orphans along all the time. At the end of the second year in Moscow, Elena accompanied me to the metro station to say good-bye to several orphans. The orphans wept, clung to me, and could not say good-bye or leave. Elena stood back and watched impassively.

Finally, I asked Elena to tell the orphans something. She agreed. I said, “Tell them the planet is glad they were born.” Elena just stared at me, and I could see a shifting happening in her soul. And then she began to weep. This year, Elena was proud to reveal she is working with orphans, acting as translator for those families who come to adopt them. And she brought along her little granddaughter to play with the clowns and the orphans. And so the ripple effect happens, and paradigms shift.

Service, done with shining light and laughter, does make a difference. Where or how that service is done is not important. There is darkness and need everywhere. Most importantly, that service must be freely done, for the joy of doing it, and never for the expectation of results. Service and gratitude of spirit, lived every moment, are the chief ingredients to joy. Nothing is more infectious nor paradigm shifting than joy.

And every now and then, the sheer magnitude of the difference your own light has made will delight you and gift you--when you least expect it.

Color and laughter, smiles, chaos, passion, sorrow, joy – these images and textures and feelings spill over my desk in a wild stack of photos, chronicling a journey of spirit . . . Magic happens, spirit-nourishment happens, total joyful chaos happens. And it becomes so clear that here, in Russia, is a people for whom the sudden apparition of a loving clown, in their face, may cause a smile for months and years to come. For a society immersed in confusion and shouldering the weight of a century of war and repression, a big ladle of unabashed laughter and joy can forge a big Band-Aid to help bind the daily wounds of living. . .

– Jan Adams, MD

The Great Circle of Service

By Jan Adams, MD

Sometimes we are in service, sometimes we are in need, and the great circle moves smoothly in this way. Service is the natural result of gratitude and love, bursting out freely if unrestrained by fear. It marks us as evolved and evolving beings. Service underlies the mechanics of the world, and places one within the natural flow of things, rather than outside looking in. It is this placement within the flow that rings such joy to those who serve. And moving into this flow causes healing among the sick at heart and in the physically ill. For this reason, I often required my ill patients to get into some form of service. Service is remarkably healing for all involved.

Another neat reality is that if one is unable to feel gratitude or love, deliberately engaging in service engenders these attitudes and experiences. And so the circle goes. So for those who would learn and practice and embody metaphysical principles, Service is the great teacher and the great provider. The question is not “What can I do, since I’m nobody?”“ The question is, ‘How can I open my eyes to see what is in front of me to do?’” People and the planet are in need everywhere. Answer the call that presents itself to you. For without Service, the New Age movement is no different than going to the country club or having one’s nails done. When the essential ingredient of Service is added, all metaphysical avenues are illuminated, and the path is clearer. Travel well, then in the immensely rewarding great Circle of Service.

The opportunity and privilege of being in service is everywhere, at all times. Need is a constant. And that giving of our time, talents and money is the perfect balance against the risk of self-absorption that can develop on the inner journey. Therefore, may we all do that service that is in front of us, thereby speeding that very transition and transformation of the planet we would facilitate by our inner journeys.