

Nasha Cemyeyka

An Arts Camp for Russian Orphans

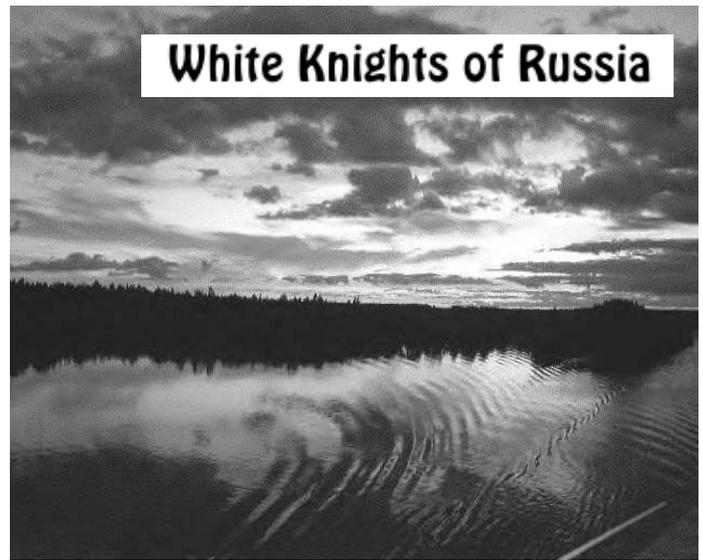
Affiliated with Maria's Children of Moscow Russia.

Several years ago (Vol.4, No. 4) we did a feature article on Maria's Children. Maria Yeliseyeva, an artist, met Patch Adams on one of his Russian Trips. After seeing the blight of the orphans in her own city she began to take these children into her Moscow studio to teach them to paint. She gives the children not only lessons in art, but love, encouragement and lessons in life. Together with her husband Ilya and their growing extended family, they have a summer arts camp which takes many volunteers for a week or two on rivers between Moscow and St. Petersburg. Shobi had the privilege of going last summer.

The arts camp was created to give these children a chance to blossom in a supportive and creative environment, and experience the joy of community service. Being on a boat together also helps create an atmosphere of love and community, where young artists feel safe to push their boundaries. An important part of the camp is visiting hospitals and orphanages along the way - clowning, bringing donated supplies, and sharing our artwork.

Julian Davies (pictured below), a pediatrician from Washington State heads up this camp "What we can provide the orphans is hope, and self-worth. Discovering the power of their imagination at our camp, and sharing it with others, will sustain them in ways food cannot. The act of providing joyful service to others in their country, just as they are the recipients of it, will be a powerful positive force in their lives."

Below is typical of the riverside activity. Standing is Maria, Julian and Julie Peterson. A boat much like ours is on the river in back.



Excerpts from A Diary of the Russian Volga Trip

By Chip Daly currently of Seattle, Washington

"The white nights in Russia is the time of year when the sun barely goes down and the night sky gives off a light glow. However, the white KNIGHTS of Russia, to me, are all the kids I met on the boat. They wear shining armors and display more courage and bravery than I can even fathom. I thank them all for showing me how to be courageous and for accepting me into their lives to share some fun and laughter.

"I spent one morning teaching balloon animals. I had their attention for about 5 minutes, then they were off making balloons on their own. Some of them were better than mine, and I have been doing balloons for 3 years!

"I got to know a couple of the kids better today. One taught me about a hundred Russian words by pointing to an object and telling me the Russian word. Out of those hundred I can remember about 3! Not too bad for a clown!

"Today we clowned in a hospital in St. Petersburg. Loads of fun, and again I am amazed at the way these kids retain information. They use all of the clowning techniques that have been taught so far. It is also fun to watch the kids who started out shy and slow, but have now opened up a little. This is just the beginning!

"Sixth day, Valaam Island. We walked about 20 km today! That's about 12 miles for you English folks! We visited two monasteries here and I really enjoyed the walk back with two young brothers who lost their mother this past year. They started out extremely quiet, but have now started to laugh and play, and by the end of the trip they are laughing and playing as hard as anyone. I hope and pray this laughter continues for them as I can't imagine what their life is like outside the boat. Either way, they have taught me things you can't learn from a book, and I am eternally grateful for that.

"Eighth day, spent at Kizhi! This was my personal favorite stop (except for the hospital stops of course). This is the all wooden church. It's beauty cannot be described, but only seen. We walked around a while and then sat around painting and drawing. I did my first and last pencil sketch here.. much for the same reasons as my first and last painting! In the afternoon we clowned at a hospital down the river.

The kids continue to show their excellent clowning talents and truly connecting with the hospitalized children. I hope they enjoyed the experience as much as I enjoyed watching them!

"I observed one of our "head" clowns playing with the kids, very cute scene! Some of my best memories are when I step back and just watch...a lot like life for me, although I do participate also)

"That night it was amazing. There we were -- all us Americans at 2 am July 4th morning standing on the back deck of the boat cruising down a river in northern Russian, singing the *Star Spangled Banner* at the top of our lungs . Who would have known! We even drew applause from some of the Russians on deck.

"Final full day. At breakfast, one of the girls said something very nice and sweet to one of our American babushkas (grandma) thru translation, and of course the babushka starts to cry. I expected that, but then I turn and the teacher of the girl is crying also, because as she said, thru translation, "I have taught her for years and have never heard her speak like that!" Before I knew it I was crying right along with them! I guess some amazing things happen to these kids on the boat. Not only for the 12 days, but for the rest of their lives.. or so we are told. What an honor to be a part of that! We had a talent show that night and two young girls, who rarely participated in the beginning, are now up in front of the whole boat putting on a brilliant dance performance! WOW!

"As I reflect on the trip I can't help but feel happy just smile inside and outside!"

At Home In Russia

by Shobi

The boat trip was truly wonderful, but for me what I will always cherish is staying at Maria's house in Moscow. When you walk in the door you immediately see a wall full of varying size jackets and shoes on the floor. And on the walls, painting and drawings everywhere. I never did figure out who was family and who was visiting. It didn't really make any difference, either. There were so



Right to Left: Maria with her mom, Babushka (Mona's Russian Sister) and Maria's youngest daughter Asya.

many children, so many adults, people coming in and out all day. The kitchen was small, but there was always food and always a few kids sitting around eating. I have never felt so welcomed anywhere in my life as I did in Maria and Ilya's home in Moscow.

Of course I didn't speak a word of Russian and try as I did, this little old clown head does not have a knack for languages. So I literally was taken by the hand everywhere I went. I can't tell you how wonderful it was just to be part of this extended family, even for a short time, and to see Russia through their eyes.

But back to the arts camp. Three pages cannot begin to tell you about this trip. It was relaxing, exhilarating, and inspiring.



I'll never forget Kolya. On the first night on the boat at dinner he sat across the table from me wearing a rainbow wig and a red nose so big it covered his face. (In the picture above he is wearing a Pro Nose donated by Mama Clown.) I called him Coca Cola (so I could remember his name). As with many of the orphans Kolya was very short for his age. During Perestroika (change from communism) many of the Russian orphans suffered from malnutrition which in turn stunted their growth. This really only added to his charm, in my clown book.

Shobi taught a clown class mostly about being quiet and sneaking around -- being aware of the hospital environment. As we were to visit a hospice the next day, at the end of class, I did a short exercise on "Sitting with a dying person." As it turned out, we went to a children's hospital instead, but the kids picked up the idea well. During the hospital visit, I caught sight of kids quietly listening to children. The little girl above was very nervous with a room full of clowns. Kolya picked up on this and was just so attentive. She relaxed with him at her side and didn't want him to leave her side.

Uncle Stevie (Stephen Stearns) taught a class on clown antics. Later during our hospital visit, Kolya did this marvelous improv with Shobi. She was juggling some scarves and kept losing one. She looked around, no scarf to the left, no scarf, to the right, no scarf. Kolya was behind her hiding her scarf. Then it would appear on her head. Kolya and Shobi improvised this scene for what seemed like ten minutes in front of a dozen or so children in the hospital. He was marvelous fun and couldn't have been done better by a professional!



Above, Sergio, one of the older boys, is one of the few true white faces Shobi has ever met. I was able to teach him how to apply and use grease paint. Just about every night he would get in front of the group with the microphone while everyone danced into the sunset/sunrise. He had a wonderful flair for the dramatic. I think this picture says a thousand words.

Sneaking Around with Big Mac by Jan Breyer

As we go into the ward in the hospital, there were a number of children and their families in the halls. Clowns stop to play with them. I wander on, looking in rooms, and find a boy in bed with his mother nearby. Hmmm. "A chance to do some sneaking around," I think. I spent some time in his room, by myself, and as I sneak out I find Big Mac (Pasha) nearby.

We sneak down the hall together, peeking into rooms from both sides of the door. We find a room with two babies and their mothers. "Ah ha" we nod to each other. We mime to the mothers -- asking permission to enter the room, as we ease our way into the room. I play with one baby by peeking around the door, hiding behind my hands and peeking out, and finally, he wants me to hold him. Wow!

Out into the hall again, Pasha is having a great time clowning. He sits at the nurses' station, and pretends to write on the charts. The nurses aren't so sure about this, but don't stop him. Then Pasha decides to "help" the woman with the linen cart. So heavy that he can't move it, so I grab onto him and start to pull. Kids are laughing as we struggle. We finally get the cart to move, to the dismay of the woman who is trying to do her job. She yells at Pasha in Russian. So as she expresses her displeasure, we again struggle

to push the cart back to her. Everyone in the area laughs so hard -- my cheeks are hurting from laughing so hard.

There are more rooms to peek into, more children to play peek-a-boo games with, more sneaking around. What a wonderful spontaneous time I had teaming with Pasha. I look forward to clowning with him on my next visit to Russia.

On behalf of Maria's Children, Shobi would like to thank all of you wonderful clowns who donated costumes, magic tricks, puppets, and supplies.

Because of you everyone got into costume and had plenty of supplies to clown with!

There are three ways to join this trip: 1) They need a small group of staff with the experience and energy to keep up with the kids and lead arts activities; 2) They're also looking for an extended family of crazy aunts and uncles, who will travel on the river boat, participating in the arts classes, clowning in orphanages and hospitals, and showering kids with the love and affection they crave; and 3) Help support a kid on this trip with a donation. If you are interested you can visit www.mariaschildren.org and/or contact Shobi Dobi (See inside cover info)

Photos by Lucy Sheffield.

In Memory of Penny Goodman



Penny Goodman pictured above with Chip Daly on the Volga River Boat Trip, June 2001. Penny had been fighting cancer for over seven years and on October 17, 2001 she lost that fight.

Penny met Maria in the summer of 2000. Even though Penny was still sick, not in remission, and she had never clowning, she decided to go to Russia and help Maria any way she could. She was there from August to December of 2000, when she had to come home for treatment. She was a great artist who recently was working with a group of third graders on teaching them art. She volunteered for Special Olympics in the past, including just last March when she was still recovering from surgery.