

ТИХИЕ ГОЛОСА

Service From the Heart Since 1984

Mission: Russia

Sharon's Journal Entries

Monday, May 5

This adventure really started last Tuesday, when I was talking with my travel agent and realized that the first AND last names on Lida's tickets were misspelled! When I asked the travel agent what would happen, she said she'd check with Air France and let me know. I called her daily until Friday, when she said she'd finally heard from Air France, that she would be sending me new tickets via FedEx, and that I would receive them the next day before noon. I gave her my phone number so FedEx could call me if they had any problems with the delivery. I was told to FedEx the old tickets to her so that she would have them by Monday morning.

Well - the tickets did NOT arrive by noon! I called FedEx, and was told my travel agent had called them, but that the tickets had never been picked up - they were still sitting at the office in New York, and the soonest FedEx could get them would be Monday morning - the morning we were scheduled to leave. We tried calling the airline to see if there was anything they could do to help us - but they said that it was up to the travel agent to "fix" this mess - they couldn't (wouldn't?) do anything! I called the travel agent, and left a message, hoping that SOMEONE would come in over the weekend and realize the problem. But, NO - no one went in - and NO ONE CALLED! What were we going to do?! I spoke with Lida and her husband several times, and it was decided that we would proceed as planned - Lida would stay with me on Sunday night, and we would both go to the airport early Monday morning.

I hoped that someone at the ticket counter would try to help us - but since I didn't have Lida's original tickets any more, there was "nothing they could do." SO - as soon as I knew the travel agency was open in New York (5:00am PST - 8:00 am EST), I called and finally talked with someone who could do something!

It took almost two hours, but my travel agent was FINALLY able to tell me that Lida would have tickets for the rest of her trip waiting for us in Atlanta - and that the agent at the counter would give her a one-way ticket to Atlanta. We were going to Russia - TOGETHER!

Well - guess what? The tickets were NOT waiting for us in Atlanta - someone had dropped the ball, and it looked like we were going to miss our flight to Paris. I called the travel agent again, told him what was happening, and asked him to talk to the Air France representative. It took more than an hour to "fix," but we finally DID end up with all of Lida's tickets. Our connecting flight had been held for us - which didn't make anyone already on Board very happy - but we were too relieved to care!

We had to wait at the gate for a long time while Lida's tickets were being processed, and at some point, I put one of my bags down on a chair. When we were rushed on board, I left the bag sitting there, "unattended," and didn't realize it was missing until I was on the plane, at which point they would not let me leave to go get the bag. I can't remember ever being that stressed in my LIFE! ALL of our cash for the trip was in that bag - LOTS of cash - if we didn't get it back, we were going to be in TROUBLE! (While it's getting easier to use credit cards in Russia, it's not "easy" - and traveler's checks are out of the question - so we always have to carry cash.) Praise GOD - the bag was still sitting where I had left it, and was returned to me with everything intact! NOW we were really on our way to Russia - TOGETHER!

Silent Voices believes that God is the Author of life, that all human life is valuable - born and preborn - and that abortion is never the answer to an unplanned, "crisis" pregnancy. We are dedicated to giving compassionate, practical assistance to women experiencing unplanned pregnancies, providing accurate information about the realities and possible consequences of abortion, and offering help, hope and healing through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ to women already struggling with the trauma of abortion.

Tuesday, May 6

We arrived in St Petersburg late Tuesday afternoon. We were exhausted, but glad to be in Russia TOGETHER! We had some trouble going through Customs because we had excess baggage. The first Customs officer was trying REALLY hard to get us to pay for what was in the extra bags - I started praying for God's intervention, and the next person we talked to just waved us on through! THANK YOU JESUS! We were met by Larissa, Misha and Victor (a Pastor from a church in St Petersburg) - they took us to Sasha and Sveta's house (young friends of Lida's), where we stayed for the duration of the trip. We stayed awake until 7:00pm, then crashed!

Wednesday, May 7

Lida and I both slept in - and were still VERY tired today. Larissa came over at noon to talk about our schedule for the next two weeks. I fixed scrambled eggs and cheese burritos (with tortillas I brought from home) - yummy! I was sick within half an hour, and stayed sick for the rest of the day. Thank God for Immodium AD and Pepto Bismol!

Thursday, May 8

We had to be up early to leave for Moscow. We prayed that things would go smoothly today, and our check in was uneventful - PTL! We prayed throughout our flight - we were on Aeroflot, and didn't feel too safe, but we made it all the way to Moscow! A driver from East-West Ministries picked us up and took us to Randy and Kim Cox's apartment. (East West Ministries is a mission board that sends missionaries all over the world. Randy and Kim are the coordinators for Russia. East West has a desire to help the pregnancy center movement grow in Russia, and are trying to network with the centers that already exist. Our purpose for meeting with them was to see if we could work with them to open a center in St Petersburg, possibly working with the Hope Centers in Pushkin that also want to open a center in the city.)

They had a nice lunch waiting for us, and were VERY nice people. Their son - Willis - gave up his room for us, so we had our own "space" and our own beds! After lunch we talked about the history of Silent Voices in Russia, and our connection with the Hope Centers in Pushkin and Pavlosk. They were VERY surprised to learn that we had started the center at the Pushkin Clinic. There have been some challenges in dealing with the two centers - strong willed personalities - different accounts of future goals - etc.. Kim and Randy agreed that it would be to everyone's benefit if the relationship between Hope and Silent Voices could be restored and strengthened.

We took the Metro downtown, and I had an experience that I've never had before - and hope to never have again. We were standing (because it was very crowded), and a man was standing behind me. He kept getting

closer and closer until he was so close I could "feel" him. He started moving in a sexual way - I was so shocked that I didn't do or say anything, but as soon as we reached our stop, I got OUT of there! I felt like I needed to take a shower!

We spent the afternoon with them in downtown Moscow, then met another East West worker at a Georgian restaurant for dinner. It was NEAT! It was underground, and had been decorated to look like a cave. We had our own little room, which was nice, because the rest of the restaurant was very noisy and smoky. We talked again over the meal, and shared with Lubyas what we'd already told Kim and Randy.

Before leaving the restaurant we spent some time praying together, and while we were praying the Lord gave me a vision of a man climbing the side of a mountain, totally focused on what he could see right in front of him. Then I could see different colors of small tiles - there didn't seem to be any pattern to them until I stepped back and could see that it was a beautiful mosaic. I believe the Lord was showing us that to really see what His is doing in Russia, we have to see the "big picture," not just the little part that each individual/ministry plays.

We walked a good distance to the Metro (to get home), and just as we were headed into the Metro entrance, I tripped over on some bricks that had been laid on end, so they stuck up above the other bricks by about 1/2", and went flying, landing REALLY hard on my right knee. OUCH! I couldn't stand up, so a couple of guys lifted me up. It took several minutes before I could walk, and then carefully. I iced my knee when we got back to their flat. Lida said that she saw my head hit the concrete first, and she was sure that I would be badly hurt. Praise God, I never felt my head hit the ground! I never had a headache - a lump - NOTHING! God is SO good!

Friday, May 9

We were up early again so we could go sight seeing in Moscow. My knee was swollen and sore, but better than last night! We walked to the Metro and met up with someone Lubyas was meeting who was coming with us, then we found our tour guide. We spent most of the

day walking around old churches and convents, and around the edge of Red Square. We had hoped to tour the Kremlin, but since today is "Victory Day" - a national holiday in Russia celebrating the end of "The Great Patriotic War" (WWII), the Kremlin and Red Square was off limits to all but the highest dignitaries. Our tour guide told us that Ivan the Terrible hired the two best architects in the world, and told them to "build the most beautiful church in the world." After they were finished, he asked them if they could make a church even more beautiful - when they said "yes," he had them blinded so they could never create anything that would surpass the beauty of St Basil's. Nice guy!

We had a nice dinner with Kim and Randy before leaving for Volgograd that night. It was SO cool to fly over Moscow that night! There were at least two dozen fireworks displays going on all over the city - very cool to watch them from above!

We had to pay an "extra baggage fee" for our flight to Volgograd at this airport because our bags "weighed too much!" They were lighter than they'd been when we left St Petersburg, but they charged us anyway. When we came back from the cashier we could see that one of my suitcases was caught in a "logjam" of other luggage. The baggage handler "fixed" the jam, but my bag ended up falling off the conveyor belt, and into a hole beside the belt. We asked the ticket agent to ask the man to get it out of the hole it had fallen in - she just shrugged her shoulders and refused to call him! She said they would get it when they realized they were one bag short when they loaded the plane. I wanted to SCREAM - but went to the boarding area and ate ice cream instead. The bag DID arrive in Volgograd - with a big tear in it - but it DID arrive. We landed at 11:30pm, and got to bed after midnight.

Saturday, May 10

We're staying in the flat that serves as Silent Voices' office in Volgograd. It's a small apartment, but freshly painted and papered. Technically, it's illegal to run a business from a flat, but it happens all over the city, and is the only affordable way to operate. So - none of their advertisements or literature has their address - just their phone number - and they keep a low profile in the building.

We spent the day with Vera and her family, and she filled us in on how the ministry has been doing. She said that it was difficult at first to get the churches to take an interest in pro-life. The response they heard over and over again was that "abortion wasn't a problem in their church." After several years, though, they've begun to see that it IS a problem in their church, and have begun asking Silent Voices for help. Sasha (Vera's husband, who works for the Bible League, and until recently pastored a church in Volgograd) says that statistics have shown that only 2% of Russian women have NOT had an abortion - YET!

We went to a war memorial that's famous all over Russia. The battle at Volgograd was the last major breakthrough of the war in 1945. Over 20,000 Russians died in Volgograd during the 2 year siege - and over 2,000 soldiers died at this site. A huge memorial has been erected with a statue of "Mother Russia" standing atop a hill overlooking the battlefield. It's the 2nd largest statue in the world, and can be seen for miles. There's also an eternal flame burning at another memorial in the park. There were lots of people there because of Victory Day - what surprised me the most was seeing large groups of teenagers coming to bring flowers to the memorial.

1 "Mother Russia" - WWII Memorial in Volgograd

We had lunch at Vera's house. They live in a home - not an apartment - and are in the midst of "remodeling." They've built a new structure around the existing cottage, and have dug the basement. Once it's warm enough to take out the heating system (hot water in the radiators), they will tear down inside, old structure, and will work on finishing the inside. They don't know how long it will take to complete, but they hope it will be finished when we come back in 2005!

Their "bathroom" is outside the house - it's big tube that's about 2' tall and about 10" across - quite an experience!

Vera's volunteers met us at the office at 5:00 - there were five ladies who were able to come (other volunteers were out of town celebrating Victory Day with their families). They had LOTS of questions - "What do we tell someone who is pregnant because they were raped?" - "How can they tell someone

not to have an abortion when they have no way to help them?" - "What do we think of contraceptives?" The last question provoked quite a discussion - most of the women go to churches that "prohibit" the use of any contraceptive, and they want to know why it's wrong. We had a lively exchange of views on the topic of birth control!

One of the volunteers shared that she is enjoying being creative, and showed us one of the "visual aids" she has made. It's a bookmark in the shape of a baby footprint, and has two small hearts hanging from it. She asks the kids she's sharing with to think about what they would say to their mom if they were an unborn baby, and they knew their mother was thinking about having an abortion. Some of their answers have been, "Mommy, I want to live," "I'm here, mommy," and "Please don't kill me, mommy." She asks them to write their statement on the bookmark, to keep it where they can see it, and if they become pregnant in the future to remember what they would have said.

2 Volunteers in Volgograd - Lida (L), Vera is next

All of the volunteers expressed an interest in crafts - their biggest frustration is not being able to get the things they've seen on the internet or that visitors have shown them. They've been introduced to "Creative Memories" products through a visitor - and would really like to have some of their products. (We've sent them some craft supplies we had at the office - if you have something you'd like to send to them, please let us know! I told them I'd seen a hole punch in the shape of a baby's foot - and now I can't find it. If you know where I can buy one, PLEASE let me know!)

After we finished with tea, we watched a video I had brought from the US. It was produced by a Russian couple who are now living in the US, but who want to "market" the video and other prolife materials in Russia. (They are giving them away - this is not a "for profit" venture.) Since it was in PAL, and not VHS, I was not able to watch it at home. It's called "Abortion: My Russia," and is a plea to Russians to stop accepting abortion as "normal," and to learn from the US prolife movement. Overall, the video was well made, but there

was a heavy reliance on pictures of aborted babies, so I told Vera that IF she chooses to use it she must be VERY careful. I told her that it wasn't something I would be comfortable using at home.

That night I had a very vivid, terrible dream that I know was triggered by the video. In the dream I was at home - but "home" looked like it was in Russia, not San Diego. Someone had left a door open, and Felix and Sugar (two of my cats) had gotten out. A big truck came careening around the corner, headed right for the cats. I started yelling, and Felix got out of the way, but Sugar turned and looked at me and froze. I could see her going under the wheels of the truck, and I was screaming "NO!" With that, I woke up - I felt very distressed and disoriented.

Sunday, May 11

We went to church with Vera this morning - the Pastor is one of Vera's brothers (she has 10 siblings, and Sasha comes from a large family, too - they joke about being related to most of the city!). He asked me to share my testimony and a little about how Silent Voices got started. I could see several women crying as I shared what God has done in my life and through Silent Voices.

After church we went to a "pizza parlor," and waited for Sasha to join us. He's spent the morning helping a friend whose car had been stolen last night. They found it wrecked in the forest on the edge of town. They caught one of the men responsible - he was someone Sasha's friend had been witnessing to and trying to help.

After lunch, we spent a lazy afternoon with Vera's family - it was nice! Later that evening we went on a river cruise on the Volga river - it was a nice way to end a beautiful day!

We stopped at Vera's house for a light dinner, and stayed for several hours visiting with family and ministry friends. Sveta - a volunteer, and Vera's sister-in-law - brought over her 3 month old calico kitten - TOO CUTE! I loved on her for as long as she'd tolerate attention! Vera has a dog named "Bark"

that I loved on, too - he would have let me scratch and rub his tummy for hours!

Before bringing us back to the office, Vera gave us some special gifts to thank us for coming. We each got a box of chocolates made by a factory in Volgograd, and Sasha gave us each a CD of Russian praise songs. He told us that a man and wife team from the Bible League wrote the words and composed the music, and they asked top Russian recording artists to sing them. Some wouldn't agree to sing Christian songs, but many had no problem singing them, even though they were unbelievers. The people who wrote the music told the singers that to do a really good job they should spend some time in a Christian church so they could experience worship as it is meant to be. Ten recording artists came to Christ as a result of their witness and this project!

While driving through town today, we heard more about the history of the city and what happened during the war. Volgograd was established in 1589. There is only one building still standing that was built before the war - everything else was destroyed during WWII. There are a few buildings in town that were built by German POWs after the war. No one knows what has happened to those men, but as far as anyone knows there were never repatriated. The people living in Volgograd (known as Stalingrad at that time) during the war were not allowed to evacuate because it would have crushed the spirit of the Russian military, so many civilians died. Those who lived hid in basements or in the forest. Vera's grandfather was a boy during the war, and he witnessed many battles and skirmishes.

Monday, May 12

We started earlier today because there were several places Vera and Sasha wanted to take us. We made a few stops at the homes/offices of friends, then drove past the oldest Orthodox church in Volgograd. We arrived at the Planetarium just as a tour was starting (imagine the Reuben H Fleet Space Center if it had been built in the early 60's). From there we drove to another war memorial along the river. There were lots of tanks and planes from WWII.

Sasha took us to a park where we did some shopping for souvenirs, then we drove back into town to have lunch with one of Vera's first clients. (When Lena heard that we were coming to Volgograd, she told Vera that we HAD to come to her house for a meal!) On the way, a dog ran out into the road a few cars ahead of us and was hit. I had a flashback to the dream I had two nights ago, and was overwhelmed with sadness and grief. It's hard to explain why this upset me so much, and I knew that I couldn't react the way I felt because Sasha and Vera would not have understood - so I tried very hard to control my emotions.

(When I've been in Russia (or Romania, Zambia or India) for a few days, the hopelessness and helplessness

of the people starts to weigh on me, wearing my spirit down. Everything in these countries is falling apart - decaying - dirty - and it feels like nothing could ever "fix it." So - seeing the dog being killed just emphasized and magnified the feeling of despair that had begun to creep into my heart.)

3 Lena and Iliya

I knew I needed to pull myself together before we arrived at Lena's home - she was SO excited to meet us, and I knew that Satan wanted to rob me of the joy of this meeting, so I prayed that God would help me stop thinking about what had just happened.

Lena already had four sons when she got pregnant again. Although she and her husband were (and are) strong believers, and very active in their church, they still considered abortion. Lena talked to Sasha and Vera, and they encouraged her to trust God, and to accept the gift He had given them in this child. She agreed not to have the abortion, but struggled with depression throughout her pregnancy, and tried everything she could to lose the baby - but she never miscarried. When her son was born, God changed her heart, and she fell in love with him, and knows now that she would have missed out on a precious gift had she gone through with the abortion. She is SO glad she has Iliya (Elijah), and grateful that Silent Voices was there when she needed help!

After lunch we had 30 minutes to get back to the office, pack, and get on the road to the airport for our flight back to St Petersburg. Our check in was fairly smooth, except that the officer checking my documents thought I wasn't registered in country yet, and was going to fine me. She finally took my passport and other documents to her supervisor who told her that everything was in

order, so she had to let me go. The flight itself was good, although Lida and I both had to deal with fear and anxiety over flying on Aeroflot again. When we landed, all the unoccupied seats behind us folded down like dominos, pushing our seats forward in the process. What a trip! We arrived in St Petersburg at 11:00pm.

Tuesday, May 13

We had the morning free to rest - what a treat! The weather is really warm, and I only have clothes for cold weather! I started praying that it would cool down! The ladies from our centers in Tatarstan and Irkusk arrived at 2:00, and we spent the rest of the day with them. I shared from Luke 10:38-42, the story of Mary and Martha, and explained how God had used these verses to calm me down right before we left for Russia. I encouraged them to keep their relationship with Jesus their #1 priority, and to be sure to take time to REST - or they could "burnout," and be unuseable for His service.

4Sharon with women from Tatarstan

We'd met most of the women on our last visit, but there were some new faces. It was a blessed time of fellowship and getting to know the new staff/volunteers from each center.

We also met two women who serve with an NGO that helps children who are "at risk." They are an outreach of the largest Baptist Church in St Petersburg. They had heard about Larissa and Silent Voices last year, but didn't know how to find her. Just last week they were offered a 3 story building owned by a bank - for REALLY cheap rent. At that point they started looking for Larissa in earnest, and finally connected with her while we were in Volgograd. They would like Silent Voices to share the space with them.

That evening we sat and talked with Sveta - she had questions about some personal issues she'd been thinking about. She feels like there no one here she can talk to who won't judge or misunderstand her. She's a sweet, serious young woman. I'm really glad we decided to stay here so I could get to know her (and her brother Sasha) better.

Wednesday, May 14

Oksana, Sveta and Nadia (the ladies from our center in Chelny) came to give us their report. Their center is in a Women's Clinic, and is open M-F between 10-5. They are struggling with the decision to register or not to register (as an NGO - or what we would call a "non profit organization"). If they're registered they can advertise freely, but if they register it means more paperwork and higher rent at the clinic (they pay \$50/month now). They are also struggling with the original agreement they made with the doctors at the clinic to keep their pro-life work "non-religious." This area of Tatarstan is predominantly Muslim, and the doctors have told them they are NOT to share their faith with any patients that are referred to them. They've tried to respect the doctor's demands, but REALLY want to share the Lord with ANY client they see. They have done so on several occasions, and know there will be severe consequences if the doctors ever find out. We discussed what it would take to get them out of the clinic and into an office of their own, and they would only need an additional \$70/month. We told them that we couldn't promise anything, but that we'd let people know about the need, AND we'd be praying that God would provide that - and more!

Our next visitors were Lena and Nadia from Irkusk (in Siberia). Lena has been involved in ministry to drug/alcohol addicted youth for 14 years. She met Larissa through Logos University, and has had a desire to begin working in pro-life for quite some time. Nadia is from the same town, but has been living in St Petersburg, and working for Silent Voices in Pushkin. Nadia is engaged to a Pastor who has a church in Canada that ministers to Russian immigrants - she will be leaving in a few days (!) to get married. She knows that post abortion counseling will be needed by many in this community, and would like to be equipped to them, so we discussed how she can get training to lead groups using our materials. We spent the rest of the afternoon and evening training Lena. We sent her home with a suitcase full of baby clothing, pregnancy tests and literature. We are not currently providing her with any financial support

- her pastor has agreed to support the new ministry for the first year.

Thursday, May 15

We were “up and out” early this morning so we could go to the French Consulate in St Petersburg to see about getting a transit visa for Lida. (I didn’t realize until we were already in Russia that we would have to overnight in Paris on our way home - I can get a visa at the airport, but Lida has a Russian passport, and has to have a visa before arriving in France.) God answered my prayers about the weather - it was cold and rainy, and we stood in line for almost 2 hours before giving up. There was a line of people in front of us, and we’d only seen one person get called in. Not only were we wet and cold, we had to meet Larissa and Olya on the other side of St Petersburg for a meeting with the Director of the ministry that just got the building they want to share. SO - we left, and made our way across town.

5 Larissa and Olya in front of building

The building is HUGE! It’s three stories tall, and has a theater, library, café, recital hall and many other rooms. Tatiana (the Director) was very excited to meet us, and showed us all the rooms that are available. It’s an incredible gift from God! She said that if we decided to move in, our rent would be based on how much space we took - but she didn’t think it would be more than \$100/month - WOW! We had been faced with the possibility of \$500+/month, so this is AWESOME! Larissa and her Board will need to make the final decision, but Lida and I felt that it was a great opportunity for us, even if it’s just a short term solution.

After our meeting we decided to go back to the Consulate to see if there was someone we could talk to about getting a visa. The receptionist told Lida that it would take 3 days to process the papers, and she could pick it up on day 4. It would have been REALLY nice if someone had told us that when we called yesterday, or when we asked this morning, since we’ll be in Paris on day 4 waiting for our flight home! What a waste of time

and energy!

We took the train back to Pushkin - it had rained off and on all day, and the ceiling leaked, and all the dry seats were taken. SO - we dried off a few seats and tried to “dodge the drops.” When we arrived in Pushkin we had to try to find Larissa’s apartment. (Lida couldn’t remember where Larissa lived). We wandered around for awhile, then Lida asked a man with a cell phone if she could use it to call a friend - and he let her! Amazing! When she couldn’t get reach Larissa, she asked if she could call one more friend - I offered him \$1, but he waved it away and let Lida make the 2nd call! Dennis was also not home, so we just started walking into town, praying that someone who knew where Larissa lived would walk by. We were ready to give up when Larissa walked out of the bakery we had just passed! We went to her house and met with her Board, and talked about their past finances and future plans. They are excited about the new opportunity - Dennis will go and meet Tatiana and see the building for himself before they make a final decision.

Friday, May 16

Lida, Ira (one of Lida’s friends) and I went in to St Petersburg to the porcelain factory where Lida used to work. We stopped to exchange dollars at a bank not too far from the factory, but they ran out of rubles before we could exchange all that we needed.

Thankfully, we had enough to buy what we wanted at the factory. We got back to Pushkin at 3:30, and all the volunteers were waiting for us. We rushed upstairs, changed and “made pretty,” then ran downstairs to meet at the restaurant where we would celebrate our 10th anniversary in Russia. It was a very nice restaurant - relatively new - with good, Russian food. There were 10 of us - volunteers and their husbands, as well as the Board, Lida and me. One of the men shared how Silent Voices has helped him value women. They are from Kurkistan, which is mostly Muslim, and women are not valued there. He has seen God use his wife in ministry, and he realizes now that women are just as important in God’s economy as men. The dinner was a wonderful time to celebrate all that God has done in Russia

during the last 10 years! We walked back, and were SO tired when we got home!

Saturday, May 17

We slept in this morning - YEAH! We left at 11:30 and stopped at the Bank to exchange dollars, but they were closed for repairs. So - we used what few rubles we had to buy something for tea, and got to Larissa's at about noon. She had the ladies from her last PAS group, and they were SO happy to see us! One woman shared how the Lord has used the group to open her eyes to what she'd done. She doesn't have any idea how many abortions she's had, and she'd never really given it any thought - but now she thinks about her children often. She spoke with such joy! While it's been hard for her to admit and acknowledge her choices - and losses - she's looking forward to a reunion in heaven! We sat and talked for several hours. Actually - I sat and listened, since none of them spoke English. Lida translated a little, but it was hard for her to keep up with what everyone was sharing.

After the meeting, we walked to the center of town to try to exchange our dollars, but arrived while the money exchange was closed for lunch, so we walked down to the bank at the end of the block. They were closed, too, so we walked through the market and bought something to eat for lunch while we waited. There was a Persian kitten for sale that was SO cute and fluffy - I wanted to buy it SO bad! Once we knew the exchange office was open, we went back, but they were out of rubles, so we walked back to the bank and FINALLY exchanged our money.

From the bank we walked to Catherine's Palace to do some souvenir shopping. Prices were much higher than they'd been in Volgograd, but lower than they were in St Petersburg, although the selection wasn't as nice. However, I still managed to spend about \$70! Sveta found us while we were shopping, so we spent some time talking and eating ice cream. It was freezing cold with rain off and on - but this is Russia, and it ANY time's a good time for ice cream!

That night we took Sasha and Sveta to "The Three Pigs" for dinner to say "thank you" for letting us stay with them. The food was good - simple, but tasty. We stopped for ice cream on our walk home. Sveta spotted some dried fish, and wanted to know if she could have that instead! Lida had fish, too, and they both seemed to really enjoy chewing on the little fish bones! I guess it's a Russian thing!

Sunday, May 18

Lida and I went to Larissa's church this morning. We went to Logos the last time we were here, but they've moved to a new location since then, and have a new Pastor. This was "youth Sunday," so the youth choir led worship and one of the Youth Leaders gave the sermon.

They also had a man from an art museum share for quite awhile about Christian art and painters in his museum - Lida couldn't figure out what he was talking about, or why he was there - it was a bit strange. The Pastor asked us to share at the end of the service, so I talked about Silent Voices, and then presented Larissa with a special pin we had brought for her.

6 Sveta and Lida eating "fish jerky"

After church we met the couple from Germany who have been so helpful in raising support for Larissa. The wife is very interested in taking the PAS program to Germany. They are leaving at the end of the month because the education available for their children doesn't meet German standards, so they're going home to put their children in German schools.

When we got home from church, Lida and I walked down to the grocery store and picked up food for dinner, and for Sasha and Sveta for the next few days. Lida left about 4:00 to go spend the afternoon to have tea with the ladies from Horizon. Sveta left at 4:30 to take the little boy she watches to the circus, and Sasha and Dennis left after 5:00 to go who knows where. It was the first time I've been alone for two weeks! I read until 7:00, then got up and fixed dinner for everyone. I had brought a can of refried beans with me (to go with the tortillas), so I fixed the makings for burritos. It wasn't quite like home since I didn't have any chili powder or taco seasoning, but it tasted pretty good anyway!

After Sveta and I had dinner, we decided to watch a "bootleg" copy of "The Lord of the Rings" - Sveta almost knows the script by heart! It's a LONG movie, so we didn't get to bed until after midnight.

Monday, May 19

We're going home!!! I hurt my back lifting my suitcase onto the bed - but we're going home!!! While it's hard to say goodbye, I'm ready to see familiar faces and places!

Wellllllll.....the Paris authorities were less than helpful. We explained the situation, and asked if there wasn't ANY way we could get a transit visa for Lida so we wouldn't have to spend the night in the airport. One Air France agent said we could ask the Police Chief for that terminal, but he wasn't available at the moment. She said she'd called over to another terminal, explained our situation to another Air France agent who would help us contact the Police Chief for that terminal. SO - we went to the other terminal - a short bus ride - and tried to talk to the agent waiting at the Air France desk. She took one look at our tickets and said, "You knew you had an overnight in Paris when you bought these tickets. You should have gotten a visa before you arrived in France." When I tried to explain that I HADN'T realized until arriving in St Petersburg, and that we'd TRIED to get a visa in Russia, she just shrugged and said repeatedly that "I knew when I bought the tickets..." She was VERY rude, and VERY unwilling to be of any assistance. She wouldn't even ask the Police Chief to consider leniency. SO - back to the terminal where we arrived, since the agent said that it was the most comfortable place to spend the night.

We arrived at Terminal B too late to get anything to eat - the only places to get food/drink before passing through passport control were closed. So - we hauled out the salami and cheese sandwiches we'd made just in case this happened, ate them and washed them down with water. YUM!

We found an alcove of seating that was somewhat secluded, and tried to rest. Lida wouldn't lay down because the seats were FILTHY, but by 1:00am, I was too tired to care, and I laid down on VERY hard, uncomfortable seats and tried to sleep. I was dozing when I heard voices - and opened my eyes to find police telling us to get up and move to another gate where they were holding the other travelers who were spending the night in the airport. There was nowhere to sit when we arrived, so we were forced to stand. I was angry, tired, and cranky from the pain and lack of sleep, and decided to ask the officers if there wasn't somewhere else within sight where we could at least SIT DOWN! They nodded towards the closed bar, and said we could sit there.

While it was better than standing, it was still miserable! We played cards, talked, rested our heads on the table, and sat trying not to roll off our chairs and onto the floor! Lida kept telling me she could see a mouse coming out from behind the bar, and finally decided to take a picture of it. She got as close as she could, and snapped the picture. Her flash hit the mirror and "bounced" back at us, and the lights all over the terminal and outside

went out and an alarm started ringing! We didn't know for sure if her flash caused the alarm, but it sure seemed like it had! We sat quietly at our table trying to look innocent and inconspicuous!

The bar FINALLY opened at 6:00am, and we enjoyed croissants, coffee and hot chocolate! It was better than nothing! When the plane we were scheduled to be on finally left, we were ECSTATIC! Neither of us EVER want to see Paris again!

The flights home were LONG, but headed in the right direction! We FINALLY arrived in San Diego on Tuesday, May 20 at 6:15pm.

Conclusion

All of the centers are doing very well - we're very proud of all that they've accomplished in less than ideal environments. We would like to raise additional support for our center in Tatarstan, and are praying that God will provide the funds that they need. We hope to continue developing a relationship with East West Ministries, and will be staying in contact with Kim and Randy Cox. We appreciate all of your prayers for this trip! If you'd like to read the "unabridged" version of my travel journal, it will be on our website!