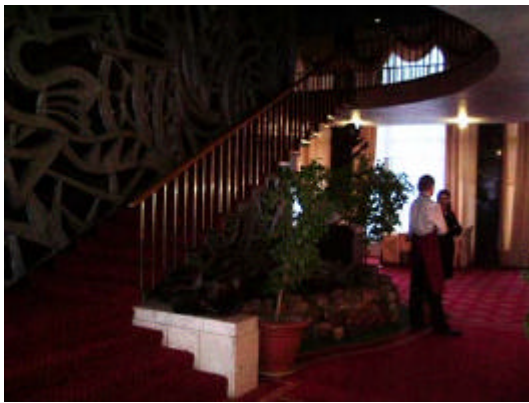


## Saturday, 20/11/2004

It's 04h00 and this is the time, after lying in bed thinking about the previous day's events, I like to write my letter.

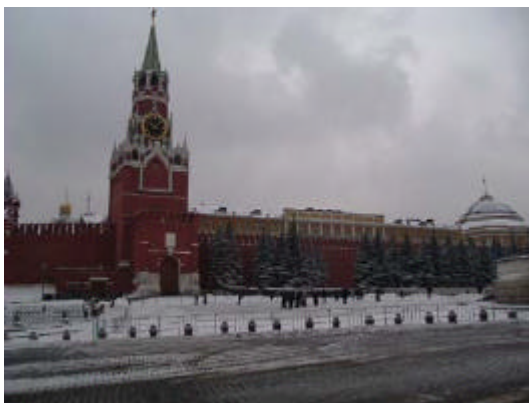
Yesterday morning, after Olga came to the hotel all cold and covered in snow, I woke up to find that the snow had finally hit central Moscow too. The girl checking hotel vouchers at breakfast in the mezzanine floor sent me to have breakfast on the 21'st floor, the rationale being that I had been there yesterday. I didn't know what this was about, but in Russia you tend to obey orders when an official gives them.

Well, I thought the mezzanine floor was plush, but that is nothing compared to the 21st floor restaurant. It sits on top of the tower block of the hotel with a panoramic view of the city. It is a huge dining hall, with a balcony surrounding the central enclosed kitchen area, another very interesting architectural feature. There is no shortage of architectural diversity in Moscow, whether old or new. And the Russians do some very interesting stuff with their plush curtains.



Anyway, I digress. Moscow is certainly covered in snow, and it's a wonderful view from up here. Most buildings seem around 5 to 10 storeys, the very tall structures being historically very old and interesting buildings. From up here, the stuff that stands out are some of these magnificent old structures.

I put on my fur boots for the first time, and armed with my new compass and a map I felt a lot more confident in Moscow. I headed across red square (with the Kremlin in the background - below,) which now is white, and had no trouble finding the internet café.



On the way to the Buteyko clinic for Ludmila's birthday party, I picked up some Russian and German wines (they don't have Australian wine) and flowers. I met some of the other doctors there and even my Interpreter, Leubov, came for the party. She's great when things get technical, although Andrey and I manage well enough with my Russian and his English. I even manage to communicate directly at a low level with some of the Russians. I've just had a sensational welcome from everybody at the clinic. Each one has been warm and friendly. Apparently they had all been greatly looking forward to my visit, and they certainly showed it.



Buteyko Clinic



Ludmila's party

### **Sunday, 20/11/2004**

Yesterday was a long day. I was supposed to meet Andrey at 09h30 at the office, but he was an hour late, having over-indulged a little the night before. Andrey, Leubov, Ludmila and I drove out about an hour to the other Buteyko clinic, which was situated in rooms they were renting from the agricultural research center. The building was old, and could have done with a bit of maintenance. It had a huge picture of the current leader, as well as pictures of many others decorated with medals in the foyer.

In contrast, the rooms occupied by the Buteyko clinic are modern, freshly and tastefully decorated and clean. Taras has his own office there where he reads his newspapers and Natalia has a very busy practice, in contrast to the city clinic. She had a large class of around 8-10 patients and is fully booked every hour of every day. Natalia is obviously doing something right. She is also involved with a world renowned immunologist, who is testing the Buteyko children over 1 year for objective improvements in immune system (skin prick and blood



tests). However, the tests are very expensive and only those children whose parents are willing to and can afford to pay for the tests themselves, can be included in the program. To date only 2 of the 8 children in the program have completed the course

over 1 year. Natalia is very happy with the results from these two children, but the numbers are so small that no scientific conclusion can be reached at this stage.

The multi-lane highway to and from the clinic is modern, fast and the fly-over bridges, being properly and fully ramped, don't have stupid traffic lights above or below them. I didn't get to see much of the view along the way, because the snow storms are limiting the view.

When we got back, Ludmila took us to see the famous cat theatre in Moscow, really intended for children. The clown (literally) who owns and runs the circus with his wife, was a good friend of Konstantin and gives Ludmila and her guests free access. I even got a signed brochure from the owner. Such a circus would no longer be tolerated in the west, the animals being kept in tiny cages between performances. Also, the balancing acts the cats were being expected to do did not strike me as particularly animal-friendly. But any possible mistreatment pales into insignificance when compared to the mulesing of our sheep and the production of battery eggs.

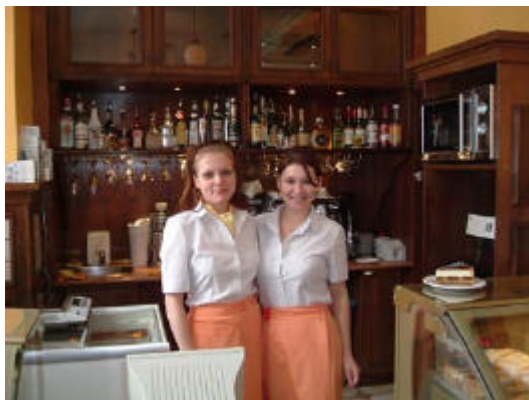
Today is going to be a particularly good day. Andrey will pick me up with the interpreter at 3 o'clock from the clinic and will be taking me home at long last to meet Olga and the children, something I have been looking forward to for a very long time.

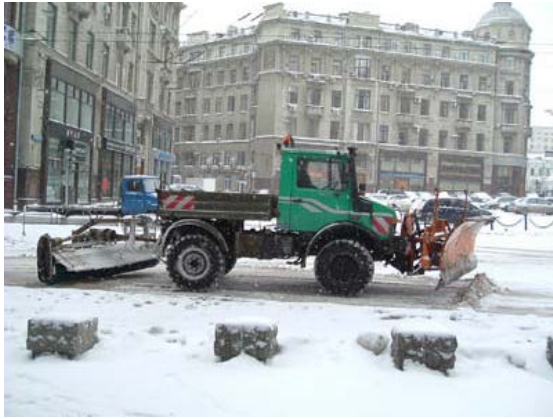
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### **Monday Morning 21/11/2004**

It is still very early but I'm looking forward to breakfast in the plush dining hall. Although it is a smorgasbord, there are plenty of assistants hovering around waiting to take away your plates. "Hovering" is a good word. The girls here don't walk:- they sort of glide or float. A lovely way to have breakfast.

I forgot yesterday was Sunday and was surprised the internet café was closed at 10h30, but the security guy told me it would open within an hour. So I continued exploring Moscow and found another one of the hundreds of gorgeous little cafes. This time I had a good excuse. The diversity of cakes and pastries is quite remarkable, and each one a master piece.





Meanwhile, outside the men and women are frantically busy clearing up the streets of the snow, hacking away at the ice and shovelling furiously. It's a hard grind, because the wind is quite bad at this time of year. Snow is great when it falls vertically. It's when it comes down horizontally that it's awful.

Well, finally the time has arrived to meet Andrey's Olga and his children. They have moved to a new apartment. There is now a program of relocating people into new and more modern accommodation, and breaking down the old buildings. Andrey says the new buildings are very badly built and it has taken them months to get the apartment fixed. The ceilings and floors were not level and lots of stuff needed repair. The new buildings still have security doors in front of the building. The Russians are very practical about this. If you need a security door, then it must be strong. So all buildings have this massive, ugly steel security door at the front, and every apartment has a solid steel security door. They have an electronic lock at the front entrance. This preoccupation with security extends to all walks of life, including searching of baggage and metal detectors at museums etc.

New apartments are still small but a lot more spacious than they used to be. They still have some interesting ideas on plumbing. The bathroom water taps are very modern, single lever operated devices. But there is only one set for the whole bathroom. The spout can be moved from the bathtub to the sink, and a lever on the cluster switches it over to shower mode. I guess the downer is that you can't brush your teeth while someone is in the shower.

Finally meeting with Olga and his daughter Anna and son Konstantin, was every bit as emotional as I expected it to be. They are a warm loving family and provided me with a wonderful welcome. Leubov the interpreter came along too with her son for the social function.

Anna reminded me very much of Lara, very intelligent, very multi-talented and she even looks very much alike with a very similar nature. I brought them books, calendars of Australian animals trinkets and a boomerang, which they wanted to try out then and there. Unfortunately the gate to the football field was locked. Olga is warm, gorgeous and I can well understand Andrey why he picked her. While talking I was shown some interesting videos of Olga at the school concerts and in her ballet classes. I watched some stunning performances of kids doing Russian dance, a very vibrant and exciting art form that I could watch for hours. I remarked that this would certainly give the kids a lot of physical exercise, to which Andrey said: "This is not for the body, this is for the soul."





Education in Russia is free. Children are streamed according to their aptitude, and Anna is at a special school where she gets advanced education. Konstantin is at a school which is preparing him for a career in medicine.

I was keen to get back home on the Metro, but Ludmila wanted to take a taxi. Taking a taxi in Russia is a very novel experience, and I didn't believe it when I heard it for the first time. Basically you go to the verge of the road and put out your hand. Every second car will stop and offer his services as a taxi. Andrey checked them out for us, organized a good tariff, and that's how we got back home. I paid for Leubov and for myself and was dropped off at the Hotel.

On Thursday night I'm taking a sleeping train to Voronyej to meet Professor Buteyko's son and daughter-in-law. She is a medical doctor who teaches the Buteyko method, and he is a physicist.

## Tuesday, 24/11/2004

Monday I had the day off, so I decided to take some pictures of the metro stations. I won't print them all here, just enough to give a bit of a taste.

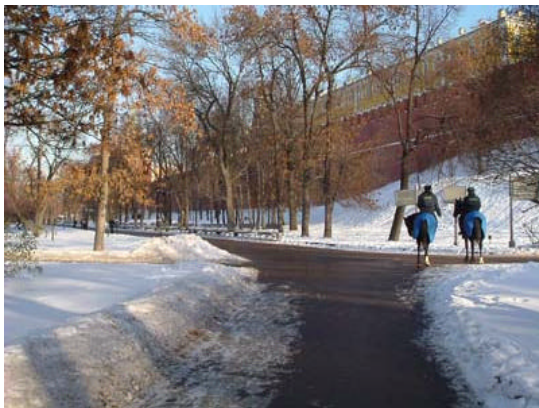
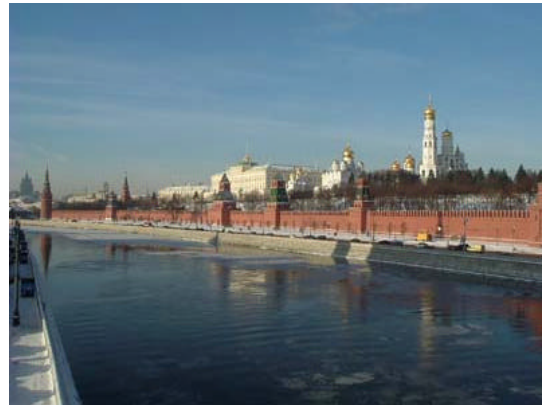
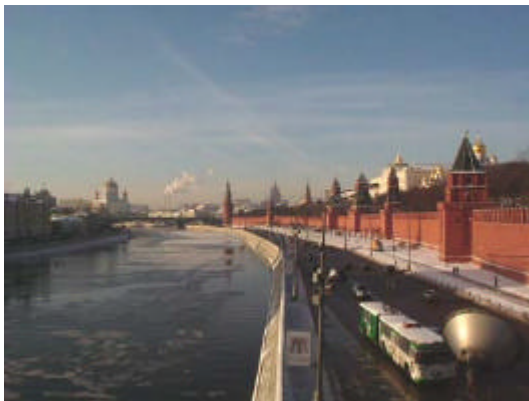


I had another look at the trains themselves. There are no overhead wires and I was wondering how they were powered. I saw that the two rails are electrically isolated from each other, and have separate electrical cables running to them at each join. The Motors must be very powerful, because each train takes up the entire platform, which looks about the length of a football field:- I sat in the back carriage of one of the trains and noticed that it reached full speed before it got out of the station. They're quite frightening to watch when you're standing right next to them. Each time I see one arrive at the station, I would lay big money that it is impossible to stop within the station. But every time I would have lost my money. I think they must use regenerative braking because there is no screeching of brakes. It is quite a spectacular system and obviously the electrical engineering of the metro, apart from the brilliant

civil engineering (building such a tunnel system under an existing city) was very advanced for the 1930's. That's something you really have to give Stalin credit for.

Interestingly while on civil engineering... The Russians don't stop their building activity in winter. Come hail, wind or snow, the building sites keep on going. And working conditions are pretty awful. They do build temporary structures around concrete lays etc, to make this possible, but much of the work is in the exposed elements.

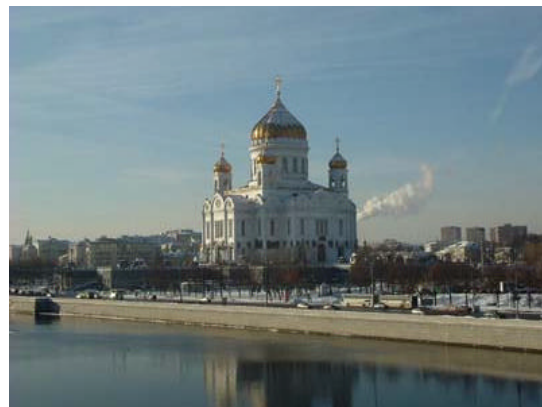
I walked along the Moscow River yesterday, along the walls of the Kremlin.



I found the entrance to the Kremlin Museum, something I'm going to try to visit today or tomorrow. I heard it was quite spectacular, especially the weapons museum.

I also found this amazing Cathedral looking thing, which I haven't worked out exactly what it is yet. But it should be in my lonely planet guide... I've just been too busy to read much while I've been

here. The Moscow river is, of course, frozen in patches. Even on a warm day like yesterday, (-6 degrees was the best I could get out of my thermometer) it is pretty cold. I have some really great double layer gloves, but the cold even gets through them. My biggest problem is that the Metro is so warm you could ride it in Australian summer gear (singlet and thongs) and still be warm. I'm the only one in Moscow who has to take my jacket, hat and gloves off when riding the Metro.



I've decided that wearing gloves is the way to go, rather than putting hands in pockets. While they are tirelessly clearing the streets of snow and ice, trailing the stuff off in huge trucks, there are a lot of very slippery spots and you really have to take responsibility for your own safety. So free hands for bracing for a fall is the way I'm going.

I seem to be blending in very well with the locals. Maybe it's my hat, but not a day goes by that someone doesn't ask me for directions. Usually I just say "Ya plocha panimaiou pa Russki" (I don't understand Russian well). Usually they smile sweetly say something that sounds nice and then move on. But yesterday a couple stopped me and the girl asked me "Gdye Gastinitzia Rossija." Well, since I knew exactly what she wanted, I thought I'd help the poor girl. I pointed and said "Idyetye pryama cheryes Krassnaya Plooshat, Pavernitzia na leva u Sabor Vasillii Blaschenovva, eta Gastinizia." I thought I did rather well, but the girl looked a bit bewildered. It turns out they were an English couple and she knew just a little less Russian than I did :o)

Yesterday we were supposed to go out to the home of a very wealthy family where Ludmila was going to teach a young boy. The family is important because they have plans to invest in Buteyko research and other Buteyko ventures. The man was also anxious to talk to me. But the mother was sick yesterday and we could not go. My interpreter came to the clinic anyway, and Ludmila scored 3 free tickets to the concert at the concert hall at my hotel. It was another block buster, with the most famous of all Cossack dancers combined with one of Russia's best traditional dancing troupe. There was big security as usual, but this time the whole front section of the hotel was cordoned off and you couldn't get near without a ticket, and then you had your baggage searched. Russian TV had their booms going again, swaying scarily across the heads of the people in the front.

Now I must say, I've never really been a patron of the arts, but I can understand what Andrey meant when he said that this was food for the soul. While the 16 Cossacks were doing their amazing dance routines, the 16 Russian female troupe wafted onto the stage, looking like matrioshko dolls on wheels. They take very tiny steps to give that gliding look. When they were all lined up in their magnificent costumes, they suddenly broke into an electrifying song with the Cossacks, their costumes swaying in unison to the rhythm of the music. I broke into tears. I'm so sorry I didn't have my camera with me for once, but I would never have been able to capture the magic of the moment anyway.

I think what spoilt it a little for me were the lengthy speeches given by an advisor of President Putin, the Presidents of Chechnya and one other neighbouring state in person, and also the lack of consideration of others by the Russian crowds. Not only do mobile phones ring at such performances, but the people actually answer them and actually make calls during the performance. They don't talk softly either. They also come and go as they please. One fat obnoxious individual arrived  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way throughout the performance, made everybody get up so he could get through to a chair deep inside the row, and then decided 2 minutes later that he didn't like the seat so he reversed the process. I was so furious I had to hold back not to push him over the banister. Maybe I'm starting to develop a Russian temperament after 10 days in Russia.

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