

# A VISIT TO RUSSIA

*A Foundation representative meets Russian readers.* BY CATHY JONES



ABOVE: *St. Petersburg.* RIGHT: *Cathy Jones.*

**M**y invitation to visit St. Petersburg came from Vitaly Kondratjev, a retired physician, who is in the process of becoming the Urantia Foundation Representative in Russia. It was Vitaly's idea, and working through much bureaucratic red tape, he has become a book distributor, making it possible to distribute *Urantia Books* in Russia. Vitaly stated emphatically that he was trained to be a doctor, not a communicator or businessman. In 1997 the Russian translation was presented to the people of Russia by [Trustees] Georges Dupont and Tom Burns. At that time a limited number of copies were brought in by Georges and Tom. Because of Vitaly's relentless efforts, on July 29, 1999 nine hundred copies of the Russian *Urantia Book* were received at Vitaly's office!

Vitaly met at the airport on August 25th together with Andrei Resnikov. Andrei had agreed to be my interpreter while I was in St. Petersburg. A Russian native, Andrei is a university professor of English and a brother of Michael, who now lives in Finland. These two brothers, both of whom had read the book in English over five times, were the primary translators of the book which is now in the hands of their fellow countrymen.

The first afternoon and evening was spent meeting with Vitaly and his wife, Irina Mulchrskaja, a retired but youthful and talented lawyer. The meeting was held in a library near Vitaly's residence. Mrs. Kondratjev had prepared a lovely meal and pre-

sented me with a beautiful floral arrangement. The head librarian, who has been graciously providing Vitaly with meeting space, also attended the luncheon and part of the meeting.

Andrei, translator-supreme, was at my side throughout the visit and I was able to look in the faces and carry on uninterrupted conversations.

We first discussed office procedures and needs that I would relay to the Foundation. Then the focus was on a reader update. Vitaly reported that he has posted meeting notices here in the library, announcing *Urantia Book* lectures which he has presented. They have been attended irregularly by a few people. He had given reading assignments to be discussed at the next meeting but the participants were not willing to open up for discussion. Because of the Communist control for so many years he felt people were not accustomed to openly expressing their feelings. This was Wednesday and a meeting had been announced for Friday, stating that a representative from America would be attending. He advised me not to expect too much response but thought some people would attend.

On Thursday the magnificent world of St. Petersburg was

opened to me. The work of the emperor, Peter the Great, the genius military strategist, city planner and builder of the Venice of Russia, was explored. The islands are connected by bridges and an underwater metro-transit system used by over four million residents and another million world tourists. The Hermitage, Catherine the Great's sprawling castle, has been made into a museum that displays the unbelievable grandeur and elegance of her day. The art collection on display in the many, many rooms is breathtaking and one of the most valuable in the entire world.

By boat we crossed the Neva River to Peter's Garden of Fountains. This park for the people is a masterpiece in architecture and landscaping, unique on the planet. That evening we attended one of the two summer presentations of the ballet *Swan Lake*. The elegant four-tiered theater was built in the 18th century and was equaled in beauty only by the brilliantly talented cast of performing dancers.

During the years of German occupation and Communist rule, the city had very little repair to its buildings and wide streets. There was a sharp contrast in eras and I was amazed to see young women in stylish dresses and high-heeled shoes walking on the cobblestone sidewalks.

As I observed the people I noted many mature folks wearing old-style peasant garb. Looking at the serious and unsmiling faces, I saw a proud, strong, courageous people who had survived long, cold winters, economic ups and downs, and a suppression of individual freedom.

Vitaly's wife did not attend the long-anticipated Friday meeting. The library had provided a theatre-style room with about fifty red-velvet stationary chairs, divided by an aisle. As we entered we were greeted by about fifteen people who were waiting, with *smiling* faces. As we three were seated at the front table, more people arrived, almost filling the room.

Many of the faces were unfamiliar to Vitaly. Evidently, word had circulated about the meeting as a result of the library posting. Opening remarks were made by Vitaly. He announced the formation of the book business and the role he was playing as Foundation representative. He then told of the first arrival of the books, which caused an applause to erupt. He then introduced me and Andrei.

I came with no prepared script, bringing greetings from the Trustees, Executive Director and staff, Council of Presidents and Vice-Presidents and the Coordinating Committee. More applause.

Questions were invited. The first question was regard-

ing the Trustees, their names, occupations, how the system worked, their responsibilities. I explained their primary duty was to print the book, keep it inviolate and provide for a group to disseminate the teachings, which led to an explanation of the International Urantia Association (IUA). I told them the organization was simply a scaffolding, a task-oriented organization that meets for the purpose of doing something—to study and practice the teachings of *The Urantia Book* and to give to the world the message that God lives in their hearts and minds and will give them guidance for their lives. I explained that we are a group of religionists who believe in the religion of Jesus, not a religion *about* Jesus. At that time, a beautiful, glowing woman who was sitting in the front row stood up and said, "We believe all that you have said. We have been practicing these things for nine years. We are ready to join the IUA now!" At that time fourteen people spontaneously stood up, smiling and nodding agreement.

Irina (a common Russian name) said she been out of town in 1997 when the Russian translation was introduced. However, she had already received the English book in 1990. With the help of a translator she read the entire book and had started giving Urantia lectures in many cities.

She and the group that had come with her then said they would like to hold a special meeting at her home the next day, and invited me to attend in order to meet the rest of the group. After further questions and answers, we agreed to meet the following afternoon. This had not been in our plans, but it immediately took priority over all else.

The Saturday afternoon meeting was one to remember forever. We met at Irina's third-floor, typical Russian apartment. Twenty people had prepared a feast of food primarily from their own gardens. They all happened to be vegetarians. It was a delicious meal.

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*Among the Russian readers, Irina is holding the Russian translation and I am to her right; Vitaly Kondratejev (wearing a suit) is on the far right, and Andrei Reznikov, with glasses and beard, is sitting to Vitaly's right.*

**RUSSIA...continued**

Before eating, everyone seated around the living room began telling of their individual search for truth. Present were men and women who were teachers, engineers, accountants, and pensioners. Many told of being taught Communism, but down deep knowing there was something more—some knew it was God leading. After searching for years one lady had joined the Russian Orthodox Church. After confessing to the priest her continued search, she was excommunicated. Their search ended when they attended Irina's lectures. Sometimes their meetings are held daily. Their second-stage goal, after achieving a firm understanding of the teachings, is to each pattern a group like Irina's. One lady said, "After meeting you yesterday, we fell in love with you and plan to learn English so we

can speak with you." Over and over they expressed their gratitude to the Foundation and the translators for giving them *The Urantia Book* in their native language.

Throughout the soul-bearing stories I was reminded of this:

*"Religion is so vital that it persists in the absence of learning. It lives in spite of its contamination with erroneous cosmologies and false philosophies; it survives even the confusion of metaphysics. In and through all the historic vicissitudes of religion there ever persists that which is indispensable to human progress and survival: the ethical conscience and the moral consciousness."* (p. 1107)

In a demonstration of how they contact their Thought Adjusters, we stood in a circle, holding hands, shoulder-to-shoulder, with Irina praying the most beautiful prayer I have ever heard. The feeling that was present in the room is beyond words of description.

In conversing with Irina, I learned that she holds Masters Degrees in Philosophy and Psychology, is an economist, a playwright and producer. Apart from her work she gives Urantia lectures to groups in many cities. Besides many in the peripheral areas, there are nucleus groups in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Kharkov, Chemovtsi, Dnepropetrovsk, Odessa, Voronezh, Zhitomir, Moscow, Petrozavodsk.

I made a promise that we would have an IUA in Russia in May 2000, and to work out the details with the Trustees and Seppo Kanerva (the Finnish translator); Vitaly's wife will help with the legal steps.

In parting, I told the group, "Lenin attempted to conquer the world *without God*. The people of Russia will conquer the world *for God* through love." ■

*Cathy Jones is an International Urantia Association administrator.*

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