



Indoctrinated

Western visitor finds Soviets unfriendly, aloof, suspicious

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

GUARDS AT the hotel's front door wouldn't have allowed the woman in. Not that she tried. She knew better.

One of the couples traveling with Helga Miller's Nomads around-the-world trip wanted to see a cousin living in Moscow. They would never have guessed that seeing her was an impossibility.

"This lady was not allowed to come to the hotel," said Miller, a Farmington Hills resident and trip director for the Nomads traveling club.

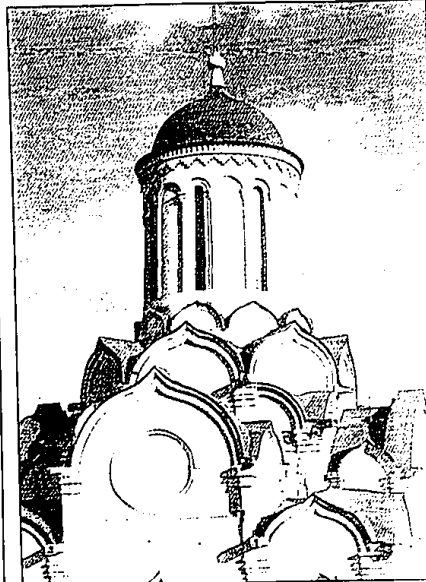
Shortly after that incident, Miller had yet another opportunity to witness the apparent fear that grips many Soviet citizens.

'From our hotel, you could look out at what I would call the slums. But they are their apartment buildings. They look like cheap hotels.'

— Helga Miller
Farmington Hills

An English-speaking young man told Miller he always wanted to go to Leningrad, which was the next destination for Miller and her 68-member traveling group. Just as Miller was

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The Cathedral of Our Savior in the Andronikov Monastery in Moscow is an example of some of the beautiful architecture in the Soviet Union. In her second trip to the communist nation, Farmington Hills resident Helga Miller noticed a renewed interest in preserving the centuries-old architecture.

Nomadic traveler gives impressions

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

An elderly woman sporting a red arm band slapped him on the hand, wrote him a ticket and collected the fine on the spot.

The man she slapped was an American traveler who, in a customary manner, stamped out his cigarette on Shanghai's crowded streets.

Just before reaching the Finnish border, Soviet soldiers boarded the train, inspecting the compartments of the traveling Americans to ensure they were not taking money out of the country.

Tense moments passed. After the Americans' passports — taken when they arrived in the Soviet Union — were returned and the train hobbled across the border, a sigh of relief could almost be heard.

"The difference — to hit the free world. You get into Finland and everybody commented that even the train tracks were quieter. It's just like a breath of fresh air," said Helga Miller, a tour director for the Nomads air travel club.

She also is the host of the cable-TV travelogue, "Around the World with Helga Miller," which airs on

Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission's community access Channel 12.

AFTER AN 18-day tour around the world featuring the largest communist countries in the world, China and the Soviet Union, Miller is bubbling with stories that bring both countries into sharper focus.

The first international stop for Miller was China — Shanghai, Suzhou, Beijing (formerly Peking). The following week in the Soviet Union was split between Moscow and Leningrad. The next stops were Helsinki, Stockholm and home.

As trip director for 68 travelers, Miller hit all the usual tourist spots. But she also likes to take her trips a step further. With lodgings in renowned international hotel chains, which are practically the same regardless of the country they're in, it's difficult to get a realistic view, Miller said.

"I like to get right in among the people behind the facades. I like to get an idea of what people are really like," Miller said.

And no doubt she did just that. She witnessed the fear, apprehension and suspicion that apparently grips the Russian people. And to her pleasant surprise, she experienced a warmer, more receptive and optimistic people in China.

"I can't remember people smiling at all," Miller said, recalling her week in the Soviet Union.



map courtesy Rand McNally Family World Atlas

This map shows the location of the Soviet Union within Eurasia.

Receptive

Chinese charm American tourists

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

The Soviet Union may never again appear on one of Helga Miller's trip itineraries. But China will.

"There's so much to see and explore. I'd go back in a minute," said Miller, following her first trip to communist China.

Difficult as it is not to compare China and the Soviet Union because of the communist rule, Miller had an equally difficult time finding similarity between the two large nations.

Instead, Miller was forced to remind herself that indeed China was yet another communist stronghold. "In China, they seem to make the best of it. They try to be happy. The society still appears backward but China did seem more advanced than Russia," she said.

In the rice paddies, human labor, rather than machinery, still rules the day. Sweat shops with poor ventilation are common. Consumer goods are still luxuries. But Miller left China with a more uplifting feeling than she had in the Soviet Union.

The Chinese people charmed Miller and her travelers. Where in the Soviet Union Miller found the people unfriendly and suspicious, the Chinese couldn't have been more receptive and kind, Miller said.

AS IN THE Soviet Union, Miller took a step beyond the tourist spots and world-class hotels to see what life is really like. She visited the slums, a commune, a medical clinic, a school, an Oriental carpet mill and a silk factory.

In the slums where people lived in nothing more than huts and shared a communal outhouse, Miller gave the children balloons. She did the same when she visited a school where the children were as excited to meet her as she was to be there.

Greeting her was the students' Chinese rendition of "Old McDonald" as a 4-year-old played the piano. "Children are cherished," Miller said, most likely because large families are discouraged by the government. "If you have ever seen the number of people in China, you'd understand that."

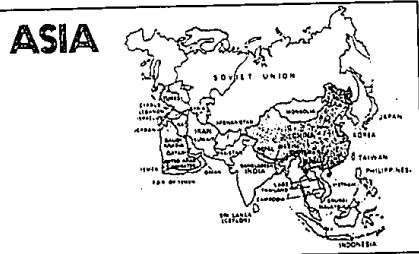
Another pleasant surprise came during her visit to a commune, which Miller expected would be depressing. She found just the opposite.

"We visited a house that a couple bought on their own in the commune," she said.

By American standards it was simple with its concrete floors and

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map courtesy Rand McNally Family World Atlas

This map shows the proximity of the Soviet Union to China.

ceMENT walls. But more importantly, the house belonged to the couple, who had decorating plans and were saving money to make improvements.

FREE ENTERPRISE also could be found. To make extra money to buy the things they want, residents are allowed to sell their handwork, such as a hand-crocheted pullover, which Miller bought. "The things we consider necessities, these people consider luxuries."

As in the Soviet Union, American dollars are very important. Students asked Miller and her travelers for dollars. "They openly say, 'Keep China green,'" she said.

China's opening of longtime closed doors to the western world are evident. Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's fast-food restaurants can be found. Clothing and music styles, particularly among the young, also are increasingly imitative of western society, Miller said.

The emphasis for Chinese workers is not a paycheck. In a visit to a silk factory, Miller spoke with young women who attend school at night. Skilled in minutely detailed handwork — a rare skill in western countries today — the women are deter-

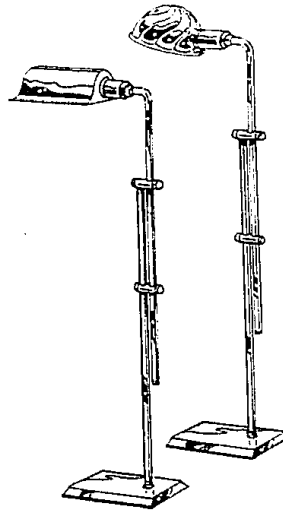
mined to improve their lives by learning new skills, Miller said.

Rather than a paycheck, the incentive to become a professional is in receiving a better job with better surroundings — air conditioning, a merit equal status, except physicians get a car for house calls, Miller continued.

THE ENVIRONMENT that Miller experienced in the Soviet Union was dull compared to what she saw in China. Shanghai with its approximately 14 million people was relatively clean and colorful considering the multitudes. But there are bicycles galore. "They are so adept at dodging each other."

Not all Miller saw was inviting. A medical clinic she visited bothered her because of the unclean surroundings. The same cotton ball was used for several people who were receiving inoculations. And while watching an acupuncture procedure, she noticed that the patients used the same dirty mat to lay on, Miller said.

"I wouldn't go to one of those clinics," she said. "It was not very clean, and I'm being kind in my assessment."



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