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Esther Matteson
Bethel College

Linda Stark
Florida Christian College

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JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME: CILA MEMORIES

ST. PETERSBURG SERENDIPITIES

By Esther Matteson

*Esther
Matteson,
Assistant
Librarian,
Bowen Library,
Bethel College,
Mishawaka,
Indiana*

*Linda Stark,
Librarian,
Florida
Christian
College,*

St. Petersburg 1998 was my first overseas trip ever! And I wouldn't have missed it! My husband and I were based at St. Petersburg Christian University, where my work involved cataloging and helping with other assorted library matters. Our original four-month stint evolved into a seven-month stay.

In Russia, it seems that everything is a challenge; nothing is easy. But, after returning home, one sometimes thinks wistfully of the simplicity inherent in that difficult lifestyle...and of the positive tradeoffs.

We had no television. So Dick and I spent long wonderful winter evenings reading books (aloud and separately), playing games (one hundred and fifteen Scrabble games!), and talking. Much of our conversation centered on how we were being changed, what this all meant in our lives, whether we would ever return to Russia....

We had no car. So we learned the exhilaration of walking (sometimes miles a day), no matter what the weather. (Weight loss is a by-product of that difficulty!)

We couldn't speak much Russian. So we learned to express ourselves to Russians in non-verbal ways... with motions, offers of assistance, and smiles. And we said "spa-see-ba" ("thank you") a lot. We were bumbling foreigners. So we laughed often, at cultural differences as well as at ourselves.

We had no control over many situations we never would have chosen (claustrophobic transportation settings, for one). So we learned to hold steady and experience the Lord's peace enveloping us, and discovered, in a new way, what the prayers

of friends really mean.

We were on our own much of the time, living out in the city in our own flat. So we learned the confidence which comes with adaptation to comfortable every-day living in a culture where we couldn't even speak.

Everything is harder and takes longer. So we learned that Westerners there are happy to get two or three things accomplished, rather than a list of ten tasks.

Our elevator didn't always work (never mind that we lived on the 15th floor!). So we learned that, yes, you really can walk up (and down) all those flights of stairs...even in almost total darkness when someone has removed the light bulbs in the stairwells. (It was a

relief to discover that I'm not a total wimp after all!)

No computer whiz, I learned a lot more than I wanted to know in the process of cataloging on a program where my cues were in Russian! (The school's computer "guru" asked me if that would be a *problem*!!!!) The program—awkward to Westerners—had been put together in the Ukraine.

We learned to highly esteem people in our Bible study and prayer groups. We met delightful Christians from many parts of the world. We came away with great respect for missionaries whose commitment to Jesus has brought them to this dark and difficult place. We were saddened at the painful experiences some of our Russian friends have had to endure, but also saw the radiance and poise their lives display as a result. What treasures those people are! How humbled we feel to have them as our friends!

CILA
Commission for International
Library Assistance

THAT WAS THEN ...THIS IS NOW

The summer of 2000 finds us again in St. Petersburg, in somewhat different capacities. My husband has taken an interim pastoral assignment in an international English-speaking Baptist church, while the pastor and wife are in the States for part of the summer. However, hopefully, part of our work will involve assisting in the move of the SPCU library to the school's own newly-acquired campus in another part of the city. We also expect to help with logistical matters related to the North American work teams coming and going to give assistance at the new campus.

BETWEEN "THEN" AND "NOW"

Dick and I have become involved in a new project from our home in South Bend, Indiana ... between the times of our St. Petersburg 1998 and St. Petersburg 2000 odysseys.

In preparation for the offering of a master's program at SPCU, many thousands of dollars are being spent on additional titles for the library. An ongoing project which has just gotten rolling this past winter and spring involves acquiring library books through the cooperative effort of people in three countries.

Dwight, a California professor who spends part of the year teaching at SPCU, is a liaison to the library there and makes decisions about books to be ordered.

His suggestions are relayed to Andrew in Saskatchewan, Canada. Andrew formerly served at SPCU. Andrew then determines from what source to order the recommended titles and places those orders.

The orders are subsequently delivered to our home address in Indiana. One week in May, we received nine cartons of books from CBD in four days!!! (Groan!!)

My husband and I are then responsible to try to find people traveling to St. Petersburg who would be willing to carry in books in their luggage. This is in lieu of mailing the books (as hundreds of dollars' worth of books previously ordered didn't arrive in over a year's time). If people who agree to take books do not live near us, Dick ships the books to them by United Parcel Service.

Since our time in Russia in 1998-1999, I have been amazed at how many people from our area travel back and forth to St. Petersburg. A faculty member at my institution is now an SPCU board member; so he goes twice a year. He recently took a suitcase full of books for us, then returned our empty suitcase the following week. Parents of missionaries from northern Indiana go to visit. A missions executive has taken in books when going to see his team members in Russia. Some books will go with us in our luggage.

We had no control over many situations we never would have chosen. So we learned to hold steady and experience the Lord's peace enveloping us, and discovered what the prayers of friends really mean.

During the winter, spring, and summer of 2000, at least seven work teams have gone to assist in the building renovation on SPCU's newly-acquired campus. Some of the winter team members took books for us. Twenty team members from one church are (hopefully) going to divide up a quantity of books I will provide, to take in their luggage when they go to St. Petersburg. As I write this the end of May, I am phoning and e-mailing other summer work team people about being book carriers.

When these work team projects come to an end, we may be in trouble! I need to find other means for reliable transport of books.

While I am not a very bold, crusading type of person, I find that I can ask, almost without apology, for people to consider carrying books in their luggage for our "cause." I guess that is because it isn't really for us at

all, but for a cause that should be of interest to anyone who has reason to be going to SPCU. *SO I ASK!!* And, several times, I have had people agree to take 40-50 pounds of books. It is such fun then, to get an email only a few days later ... and the books are there and being unpacked!

It is interesting and perhaps surprising to find what all a person can do for mission causes from right here at home. Once I had been at SPCU (and this is certainly true for Lois Luesing, as well, who was there part of the time we were in 1998-99), the people there contact us for answers to cataloging questions, for suggestions relating to their new facilities, for help in acquiring back journal issues (some of you have helped me with that!!), etc.

I have given cataloging assistance on some books headed for SPCU from my own den at home ... by connecting to the Library of Congress Online Catalog to determine call numbers and subject headings. These are two of the more difficult tasks for Russian librarians; they can find almost everything else they need to know from the volume itself.

My 1998 opportunity to go to Russia came through my college, which had forged a partnership with SPCU to give assistance where possible: leadership training for their administrators, two-way student exchanges, administrator exchanges, loan of faculty, and other helps. My academic dean asked me to go, and then Bethel College continued my salary at home and paid my husband's and my travel costs and assisted with our living expenses in St. Petersburg. In all, we stayed for seven months!

AND SO...

I—who had never been overseas before 1998, and who had grown up wanting to be a missionary—am finding it

rewarding to see what assistance I can give from home, what connections I can make on behalf of God's work in other places. All of that would never have come about, had we not gone to Russia (*in fear and apprehension*) when we had the opportunity two years ago.

(Our summer 2000 experience has grown out of connections we made in 1998-99; and, this time, we were responsible for our own support, which the Lord has provided most graciously and abundantly.)

I realize that being sent by my college in 1998 was a unique opportunity that doesn't come to everyone. On the other hand, maybe there *are* other institutions whose personnel's interest in overseas work *could* include such partnerships *if* the idea were presented to them. What a blessing such assistance can be to a ministry in a country where everything—money, facilities, trained people—is in short supply.

But it's hard to tell who is blessed the most!!

MYANMAR LIBRARY TRAINING SEMINAR

by Linda Stark

The Library Training Seminar was one part of the Asia Christian Training Seminars conducted by members of the faculty, staff, and administration of Florida Christian College March 14-24, 2000, at Eastern Bible Institute, Yangon, Myanmar (Rangoon, Burma). Faculty and administrators from eight Bible Colleges and Bible Institutes in Myanmar attended the various classes.

Librarians were present from Myanmar Bible Institute, Pwin Oo Lyin; Putao Christian Bible Seminary, Putao; Mulashidi Bible College, Putao; Myitkyina Bible College, Myitkyina; the Church of Christ Bible School, Myitkyina; and the host institution.

The librarians had four full days of work on introductory principles of administration and cataloging. Five copies of the Library Manual were distributed for use as a textbook for the class and for the librarians' future reference; a privately-prepared list of subject headings for a Bible College library was also distributed to each institution, along with books for their collections and some library supplies. Eastern Bible Institute and Myitkyina Bible Institute have electricity and some computers, so copies of the Librarian's Helper software were given to them as backup to the copies they had.

This was a return visit for the team, most of whom had gone in 1998 also. The host librarian reported that following

the previous seminar two attendees had established libraries at their institutions, and others had done some reorganization.

The library seminar was taught from the Teaching Syllabus for the Manual, adapted for the circumstances of these libraries and the short time allowed us. Their circumstances include very limited travel and communication, and almost no money for books. They depend on donations of materials such as we and others are able to carry in each time we go. The emphasis for the week was cataloging; after an introduction to cataloging principles the time was given to cataloging practice by cataloging the books our team had brought.

In the 2000-2001 school year, we hope to have A. Simon Thaug, the host librarian, as a student at Florida Christian College. Our overseas scholarship students are employed by the college, so we have requested that his employment be in the library.

The hosts and participants were most gracious to our visiting team; experiencing such a warm expression of Christian love and brotherhood extending across the geographic distance and cultural differences has been a very rewarding experience.

NEW REQUESTS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBRARY ASSISTANCE

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INDIA - Susamachar Theological College and Seminary (STCS) is a new training institution in Bhopal, North India. It is a member of the Asia Theological Association and is offering the B.Th and M.Div degrees as well as diplomas in Cross Cultural Ministry. Presently books are being requested in biblical fields since someone in Chicago has offered to send about 10,000 lbs. of books by air to Bombay. Help in setting up the library is requested for 2001. The contact is Dr. Samuel Mathai. His email is smathai@vsnl.com.

SOUTH AFRICA - A seminary and Bible institute of the Christian Reformed Church of South Africa, located in Benoni, some 30 minutes from Johannesburg, is begging for help in organizing a collection of some 5,000 books. Both man-power and know-how are needed to help select and install library automation and train staff there. April is an especially good time for them as are July, August, or September.

The contact person is Bill Carr, vice-rector of the seminary. His email address is bcarr@mweb.co.za/ with a cc: to crcsa@mweb.co.za.

Please contact the CILA General Secretary if you are interested in any of these opportunities. †