

FRIENDSHIP

IN THE TARGET ZONE

BY DOMINIC TARANOWSKI

Dominic Taranowski is a recent high school graduate from Vermont who, after visiting the Soviet Union last summer, became "newly aware of the urgency of current cold war conditions."

"That word is 'September,'" said the young woman behind the counter of a poster shop on Nevsky Prospekt, the main boulevard in Leningrad. She pointed to a series of Cyrillic letters at the base of a poster depicting a young school girl with a bouquet of flowers. "September is when children begin school."

"And what about this up here?" I asked, gesturing at a short paragraph next to the girl with the flowers.

"That is, well, it tells of a new law that was passed making peace the first lesson for children just starting school," she explained. "You see, the teacher will start the class by writing the word 'mir,' that's peace in Russian, on the board. She then explains the word and it becomes the first word the children learn to spell."

I was astounded. Were these the same Russians my president regularly warns me about? The ones who will stop at nothing to secure control over the "free world"? Something is wrong here, I thought. This can't be the same country that the U.S. has tens of thousands of nuclear missiles targeted at. Well, it was and many times during the 25 days I spent with 120 other Americans in the Soviet Union this summer I experienced the uneasiness of realizing that American-made warheads of indescribable destructive force were aimed directly at me.

The tour, which has become an annual event, was called the Volga Peace Cruise. It was so named because of a 10-day excursion down the Volga River aboard the *M.S. Alexander Pushkin*, a substantial cruise ship

that became the sight of many seminars as we traveled between cities.

Each morning discussion groups would assemble in different areas of the craft to be joined by a team of resource people from the U.S. and the Soviet Union who would participate in two-hour talks on such issues as: "The History of U.S.-Soviet Relations," "The Arms Race" and "Soviet Life."

The Soviet resource people were from the Soviet Peace Committee as well as various institutes for international relations and world economics. We had ample time to confer about issues with these people during dinners and other free time.

On one occasion, I joined a collection of young people discussing youth in the USSR and was struck with the realization that young people in the Soviet Union know a good deal more about American culture and society than their counterparts in the U.S. know about the Soviet Union. A young girl from the group inquired: "What American literature do young people read in schools?"

"Well," said Dr. Vsevolod Marinov from the Institute of Economics of World Socialist Systems, who had volunteered his evening to talk with the American high school students. "Of course American literature is very popular here. We read the books of Mark Twain, John Updike, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Vonnegut, Joyce Carol Oates and others. They are very much in demand." He turned to me. "And what about you? What Russian authors did you read when you were in high school?"

"Russian authors? Well, in high school I read...um...let's see...well...Tolstoy?" I was embarrassed to admit that I had read no Russian authors in high school and gained only a limited knowledge of the country's history there.

Togliatti, a comparatively new city of 600,000 people on the

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'Though our trip may be lost to superpower rhetoric, it remains as a testimony that peace and friendly relations are attainable.'