

2005 BIKE RIDES

Evgeny (Zhenya) Loginov

Sponsor, Gary & Sharon Finamore



To be honest I didn't believe the fact that I would be going to the U.S. to study for an academic year until the moment we started to fill out all the documentation and attended the first meetings with our Sister City Association members from Vladimir. This was the starting point for the real excitement to take place. But I didn't even imagine how exciting it would be.

I will always remember August 13th, 2004. The day we left for Moscow airport Domodedovo and started our journey to Bloomington-Normal. We were really looking forward to this trip. Everything we saw as soon as we landed was completely new to us. I was excited about how O'Hare airport looked; the transport infrastructure was amazing. It was great to have a first walk along the Constitution Trail.

Getting to live with my family, the Finnamores, was a great moment. I felt like they have made their place a second home for me. The first days of my travel started from going together for bike rides, swimming and having weekends at the campground in Wisconsin. It was such a great feeling of joy

and freedom!

In parallel we have solved all the questions with the high school, and by the end of August the new great experience had started.

It was extremely interesting to get familiar with the education system in America. There are so many activities and clubs a person can take after classes! And the feeling at school was very interesting: from one side everything was completely new, and from the other one – many things were so similar! It was very interesting and challenging for me to take American literature classes. Getting deeper into the culture itself, and reading more and more books in English was a great experience.

From the other side, the similar things were waiting for me in Math and Science classes. What was different was of course the language. But the logic, the equations, the tasks are similar all over the world. And it was very interesting to work with something similar from one side, but different from the other.

Now, 10 years after my trip most of the valuable things are the memories: the memory about my family and such great care they took of me that year and the memory about the school, extremely friendly teachers and students. And the memory about the members of the Sister City organization who also made a great contribution towards making my stay so comfortable and astonishing...Who invested huge amounts of time to make this program live... Who invested huge amounts of time to make the dreams of many Russian students come true.



2005

THE SON WE NEVER HAD

Sponsor, **Gary & Sharon Finamore**

Evgeny (Zhenya) Loginov

We were Evgeny (Zhenya) Loginov's host parents during his educational exchange at NCHS for the 2004-05 school year. We live in Bloomington where I am currently employed with Pekin Insurance and Sharon is a nurse at Fort Jessie Family Medicine.

Our involvement with the sister city program began in a very unusual way. Sharon attended a sister city event welcoming the two Russian students coming for the year. The original host for Zhenya had to withdraw so Sharon volunteered to consider hosting him after consulting with me. After some thought, we quickly agreed to become the host family. A male coming into a household with two daughters was tricky because we were very close to them. The girls noticed that our time and affection had to be shared. However, it all worked out well.



I love to bicycle and Zhenya joined me frequently for long rides. He loved cars and we did take him to the Auto Show at McCormick Place in Chicago. I think the size and quality of this show made his eyes as big as saucers. He took pictures of many many cars but unfortunately had his camera stolen.

Zhenya was a perfectionist who wanted all A's. He took junior-senior classes here at age 15. He was a very bright student, especially in math and science. He was a strong competitor in the WYSE (Worldwide Youth in Science and Engineering) competition for NCHS. English was more of a challenge for Zhenya but we encouraged him to take it. To aid in this endeavor we wouldn't let him study American Literature in front of TV. His favorite teacher was Mr. Keogh in International Relations.

During Zhenya's stay the family went to Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Wisconsin Dells, and the St. Louis Arch. We tried to help broaden his interests. At the Arch he learned about westward expansion and saw the Scott Joplin Museum. The museum was particularly exciting because Zhenya played the piano and Scott Joplin was one of his favorites. Piano blues was a shared interest between Zhenya and I.

Zhenya did not date during the school year. He had too many other interests to worry about that. He did very reluctantly go to prom with the other Russian exchange student. Zhenya and our daughters Leanna and Emily traveled alone in April to visit my mother and father in Denver. While they were there, I was diagnosed with a cardiac problem that required surgery and five bypasses. When he observed the cardiac cath pictures before surgery, Zhenya reassured Sharon that everything would be all right because medicine is of high quality in America (very sweet).

We miss Zhenya in so many ways—his energy, preferring to eat at home, dinner table talk, volunteering to mow the lawn or help a neighbor shovel the sidewalk, and appreciation of the American lifestyle. I think the family now feels that he is the son we never had.



2005 FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Tamara Pitskaleva Sponsor, Rick Glass & Barbara Campbell

I, Tamara Pitskaleva, took part in an exchange program between Vladimir and Bloomington-Normal in 2004-2005. I want to share some of my impressions about this trip with you. In spite of the fact that it was my second trip to a foreign country, I was a little bit worried. But right after my first acquaintance with my “future” family all my fears faded away. It was a very intelligent family with a good sense of humor, well disposed to a new family member. I think that most of the exchange program participants will agree that the first barrier we face is that of language. American speech is fast; they use clichés. My family took part in organization of my free time: traveling (Chicago, Boston), sport activities, and vocal and acting classes. I participated in a large musical performance offered by my school. I sang in the chorale with the other students. I had a small role, but I felt a lot of amazing and positive emotions, especially since it was my first such experience.

My study program contained not only regular subjects such as mathematics but also completely new ones: French, sociology, psychology. The last two were quite difficult for me, mostly because of the terms, but I had a good teacher. Whenever it was possible she tried to help me. Our study was based on creative work including projects and presentations. Of course my host family was so helpful in giving me study advice.

In contrast to my Russian family, my American host family gave me almost complete freedom of choice. However, all the responsibility was then on me which made it more serious, and I learned to make deliberate decisions. Of course we had some disagreements, but we tried to overcome difficulties together.

On the whole, I was satisfied with the exchange experience. I was greatly motivated by receiving regular communication that helped me deal with personal difficulties. I experienced personal growth and felt a sense of trust and responsibility.

In conclusion: the exchange program brought many benefits not only to me but I think also to my host family. I made new friends, learned about another culture, and received knowledge in new scientific spheres. I’m thankful for everybody who gave me that chance and supported me!



2005 LIVING IN THE PRESENT

Sponsor, **Barb Campbell & Rick Glass**

Tamara (Toma) Pitskaleva

Our time with Tamara Pitskaleva was wonderful but challenging. "Toma" was vibrant and outspoken, which sometimes made life unpredictable.



Our family started with some antiquated stereotypes about exchange students. I assumed Toma and our own daughter would become lifelong friends, be in each other's wedding, visit the families decades later. Isn't that how it always works? Toma arrived, and within minutes it was clear these two 15 year-old girls living under one roof had almost nothing in common. They could barely stand each other. It was going to be a long 10 months.

To their credit, they were always civil to one another. I'm not sure I would say the same about me. Toma was a free spirit and didn't always agree with our household rules. Little things to her, like not wanting to wear a seatbelt, were big things to me. With our own 3 children, my friends had jokingly dubbed me The Mom From Hell because I was very strict about things that mattered to me - personal safety, grades, and public manners were the big three. None of these seemed to be prominent on Toma's radar.

She loved contemporary pop culture and disliked the old or historic - so our extended car trip to Boston was particularly painful for all of us. But once we let go of the "All Russian students love school and excel in their studies" myth, we began to appreciate Toma's qualities. She adored animals, even our cranky old cat. She enjoyed music and dance, and while she struggled with the idiomatic textbooks, she showed insight in her classes in sociology and psychology.

As the year went on, we began to realize how much pressure she had from home: frequently absent parents, family and friends convinced that anyone who visited the U.S. came home fat, and a 'perfect' older sister in medical school who seemed to be everything to their parents that Toma was not. I was particularly upset that Christmas gifts we gave Toma were expected to be passed on to her sister. Who wouldn't be a bit rebellious under those circumstances? Still, she could get homesick, and missed her family and her cat.

She liked holidays and embraced 'new' ones like Halloween, not just the traditional Russian New Year. Toma loved fashion and shopping and could find a bargain like no others! I lightened up considerably, and she sometimes left the house wearing something my own kids would not have dared. But whatever she might wear, Toma was a sweet girl and I was the one who needed to keep that in perspective.

We haven't stayed in touch - old myths die hard for some, but Toma taught me something about living more in the present.

2005 LIVE WITH A HOST FAMILY

Katelyn Arendell

B/N student to Vladimir



Senior to visit Russia during summer in Sister City program

By Mihkel Smit
News Editor

Continuing a tradition started four years ago, Katelyn Arendell (12) will be visiting Vladimir, Russia, as part of the Bloomington-Normal Sister City program from June 9-23.



Katelyn Arendell will be going to Russia over the summer. She will be attending Russian high school, as well as sightseeing in Moscow, Russia. (Photo courtesy of Normandy Village)

"I have never left the country. I thought it would be a great experience to live with a host family," she said.

Arendell added that she wants to learn more about Russian society and culture.

To do this, the senior will be spending two weeks with a Russian family and an English-speaking teenager.

"I hope this trip teaches me about Russian culture and how not every culture is like ours," Arendell said.

While in Russia, she will have the opportunity to visit several Russian cities, including the capital of Russia, Moscow; Vladimir; Gus-Khrustalnyi; and Suzdal. She will attend various Russian high schools, which will be just finishing their school year at the beginning of June.

According to Arendell, she will be sightseeing as well as going to a few high school graduation parties during her two-week stay. To prepare for the trip, she is going to take a few Russian classes and read books on traveling abroad.

The senior will also have the chance to go to social activities, such as out of

town picnics. In addition, she will have the opportunity to go to shopping centers and buy authentic Russian souvenirs.

The program is sponsored by the Bloomington-Normal and Vladimir Sister City Associations and costs \$1,360.

Last year, there were 18 applicants for the trip, while this year only Arendell was interested in going on the trip to Russia, Social Studies Teacher Kelly Keogh said. However, any additional students interested in the trip should contact the Bloomington-Normal Sister City Association by March 4.

The Sister City exchange, Mr. Keogh said, gives students an appreciation of a culture, especially since they will be living with a family and not just visiting for three hours.

"One day, we hope that it would be a year-long trip," Mr. Keogh said.

Mr. Keogh added that the current low number of interested travelers is discouraging due to the number of applicants last year.

"The students will never be put in an unsafe situation [because they are always] with a Russian family," Mr. Keogh said.

Previous students who have participated in the Russian exchange program include Andy Groves ('04), who went two years ago, and Leanna Finamore(11), who travelled to Russia last summer.

Any student interested in going on the trip should call Orlyn Edge of the Sister City Association (452-3021), Mr. Keogh said.

During the 2005-2006 school year, NCHS students will have the chance to host Russian students.



2006 MY TURNING POINT

Polina Karyakina

Sponsor, Mary and Mike Walker

I cannot believe that I first came to the U.S. almost ten years ago. Time really flies.... In 2005 I was a 15-year-old school girl and right now I am 25 and teach English as a foreign language at Vladimir State University. And I can definitely say it's been my best experience so far. Ten years after I often remember my life in the USA, the people I met there, everything I learned about American customs and traditions, lifestyle of simple Americans. And what's most important is that now I can tell my students about my American life and they are always eager to listen.

First of all, I'd like to speak about the family I stayed with, the Walkers: Mr. Michael Walker, Mrs. Mary Walker and their wonderful daughters, Gia and Jennifer. You know, the best way to get to know the country is to live in a family. Because you can read thousands of guidebooks or some other literature about a foreign country and its people or you can stay at a hotel and you will never know HOW these people think, WHAT they eat in the morning, HOW they spend weekends or WHETHER they enjoy eating at home or prefer going out for a meal. My family (I can call them my second family) did so much for me especially when I got sick that I will never be able to thank them properly. Mr. and Mrs. Walker were like my second parents who cared about me. I hung out a lot with my American sisters, Gia and Jen, and this helped me to see how American teenagers spent their time. I can say that American teens are more independent as they for example begin driving at the age of 16 while we in Russia can drive legally only when we're 18.



I'm so grateful to my host family as they showed me such wonderful places as Chicago and Springfield. Our trip to Chicago was great! It was December, pre-Christmas time, and we walked a lot, drank coffee, saw a Christmas musical. My mind has kept a memory of us having dinner in some Greek restaurant where we laughed, talked, ate delicious food. I remember how Jen and I couldn't decide what dessert to choose and how we laughed at the limos we saw in front of the concert hall joking that they came to pick us up. Also during the spring break I stayed with the Boecks, Bruce, Diane and Stacy and we went to St. Louis, stayed at a hotel and I also saw how university life in the USA is organized (We went to one of the universities where Stacy was going to study.).

What about school, I can say that it was the most difficult thing as schools in Russia and America differ a lot. In the USA you don't have one class of students, every hour you're surrounded by different people. In Russia we have one class usually consisting of 20-30 pupils. For me, a Russian girl, it was difficult to adapt to that. And I can say that the most unusual thing I noticed is that...American students don't cheat during tests (or at least they do it very carefully) unlike we do. One day, during my American Literature class, one girl after finishing writing her quiz turned her sheet of paper over as she was afraid I would try to look at what she had written! That was weird....But then I got used to it. American individualism vs. Russian collectivism! I still remember my teachers from Normal Community High School who were so kind to me when I needed help (I have to notice that I had no problems with understanding the language and speaking, no problems at all!): Mr. Jelinek, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Dickenson and many others.

This experience changed my life completely. Maybe I didn't realize that at first, maybe this came to me years later...But my trip to the USA helped me stop being afraid to speak in public. I had always been very very shy before. But in the USA I had to speak a lot in front of different unknown people in English! After I came back I took part in some school concerts and later at my university I began performing on stage with

my friends! I became more confident! I became a different person!

I was so blessed to have spent almost a year in this wonderful country, to have met so many amazing people who supported me all the time and helped me to get to know the REAL America. I admire Americans for their hard work, for their tolerance and independence. Of course there were some unpleasant moments but frankly speaking I...almost forgot them. You know, bad things always vanish from your mind and good memories remain. I will never forget this time spent in this great country, it gave me so much that I will always remember this period of my life. This exchange program also helped me to master my English. I remember that one American lady even told me I spoke almost without an accent; and it's the best compliment I have ever received in my life. I can admit that I love speaking American English and prefer it to British English. Especially I love words where we have a letter "r": letter, sister, understand.

I can say that such exchange programs need to take place. They unite nations, they unite different people, and they help to build a bridge between countries, which is very important nowadays when we often forget about such simple things as tolerance, patience, freedom, kindness.

I want to thank everyone who helped me through this program (There're so many people to mention and if I forget someone, I'm sorry): my host family, the Walkers(Michael, Mary, Jennifer, Gia, Grandpa Victor, Mr. George Walker and Mrs. Donna Walker and other members of their wonderful family), Mr. Orlyn Edge and Mrs. Jana Edge, the Houses (Their daughter Natasha was my friend at school.), Mr. Bruce Boeck and Mrs. Diane Boeck and their daughter Stacy and of course I would like to mention a wonderful girl, Katelyn Arendell who stayed with our family in Vladimir for two weeks in July-August 2005. My family and I often remember her as it was so exciting to get to know a person from another culture, especially before my leaving for the USA.

Thank you all for such an incredible opportunity!!!!

I really hope that I will be able to return one day and meet you all once again!

Love,
Polina



P.S. Nowadays I'm an assistant lecturer at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Vladimir State University. I teach English as a second foreign language to future teachers of two foreign languages. I'm also a post-graduate student. Right now I'm in the process of writing a dissertation. In my dissertation I concentrate my attention on the history and development of the inclusive education of special needs students (especially with mild mental retardation) in the USA in the second half of the 20th century. And my scientific advisor is the person you all know very well, Elena Rogacheva. So as you see, I cannot part from the USA and English and they will always be an inseparable part of me!

Polina & exchange student, Tanya Smyslova

2006

POSITIVELY POLINA!

Sponsor, **Mary and Mike Walker**

Polina Karyakina

Polina Karyakina lived with us as an exchange student from Vladimir, Russia for the school year 2005-06. Polina & fellow student, Tanya Smyslova, arrived in August 2005 the week before school started. I remember meeting and greeting the girls at O'Hare airport and how relieved my husband Mike and I were that they had arrived safely and on schedule. I guess that's the "Mom" in me! Polina and Tanya were really excited to finally be in the U.S. and really tired from their long trip. They fell asleep just as we reached the I 55/I 80 interchange. Our older daughter, Gia, was a senior that year at NCHS and Polina was a junior. They drove to school together and had two classes together. Gia remembers Polina as a very sweet, nice person and a very good student. Our younger daughter, Jennifer, was in the fifth grade and thought it was "really cool" to have another older sister from another country to share her culture and customs with us.



I recall taking Polina to NCHS the day after she arrived to register her and she pointed out to me how polite and patient everyone was waiting their turn in lines and going from one registration table to another in an orderly fashion. She said that was NOT how people behaved in Russia! Everyone who met and talked with Polina marveled at how well she spoke English. That always made her smile! It is fitting that Polina is now teaching English to Russian students. That makes me smile! I guess that's the teacher in me, too!

Polina turned Sweet Sixteen in September. We hosted a birthday party for her and almost everyone from the B-N VSCA attended. It was a lot of fun and made Polina feel special. In October, Polina and Tanya went to the Homecoming Dance with new friends that they had made at both NCHS and U-High where Tanya was a student. As the girls were getting all dressed up & ready to go I realized that no flowers had been ordered for them so I made a quick trip to the florist so the girls had flowers, too.

As a mother I worried about Polina being so far away from her home so I always made sure that we had time alone together to talk as mother and daughter because I knew she missed her family. She especially missed her little brother who was in kindergarten the year she lived with us. One of the things I appreciated most about Polina was her dedication to her studies and the example she set for our two daughters. Every night after she finished her NCHS homework, she spent several hours keeping up with her Russian school studies. Polina loved books and it was a joy to share them with her as gifts to take home to Vladimir. I know that's the librarian in me!

My father had just moved permanently to a local nursing home. Polina enjoyed visiting "Grandpa Vic" and was very interested in the whole "nursing home" environment since Russia does not have them as we do here in the U.S. For the Christmas holidays we took Polina to see the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes perform in Chicago and see all the decorated department store windows along the Magnificent Mile. We are so glad that we responded positively to the request to become Polina's host family and that she responded so positively to all of us as a member of the Walker Family.

2006 STRAIGHT A'S

Sponsor, **Carol Benson**

Tatiana (Tanya) Smyslova



Tanya is my Russian daughter and I'm her American mom. It's difficult to remember a time when I didn't know and love her, but I'll try.

I'm sitting in a McDonald's, remembering the year that Tanya lived with me. I remember driving her to school, to chemistry labs on Wednesday evenings, and to occasional school activities. I remember being her teacher for AP Calculus but her mom the rest of the time. I remember trips – to



Carol, Tanya, and Carol's daughter Rebecca

Ohio to visit family, to Chicago to see the Art Institute and to eat in a Russian tea house, to Springfield to the Lincoln museum, to Idaho to see family and ski, across town to share a meal with a daughter and her family. I took Tanya to my church for a cultural experience. I remember sitting at the dining room table studying or just sitting at dinner talking about our days or our families or current events. Tanya became a member of my family.

Tanya shared stories about her family and growing up in Russia. Her grandparents have a place in the country that she visited in the summers, growing vegetables and enjoying the fresh air.

She is an only child. Her parents both work and have instilled in Tanya a strong work ethic. She's very focused on her goals. She came to this country to learn and that is exactly what she did. I find that I am a proud parent when it comes to Tanya.

She got straight A's at University High School, even in English and that

isn't easy. She also earned an A in French, AP Calculus, AP Chemistry. In the midst of achieving all these accomplishments, Tanya found time to study for the exams she would take when she returned to

Russia. She scored well on those and was admitted to a prestigious university. She has been very successful academically in Russia as well and is currently teaching at a university.

I am very grateful to the exchange program for bringing Tanya to me. She has an open invitation to stay in my home whenever she returns to the U.S. And I plan to visit her someday as well. She will always be my Russian daughter.



Tanya & Polina Karyakina

2006

GIRL WITH A PONY TAIL

Tatiana (Tanya) Smyslova

Sponsor, Carol and Rebecca Benson

It's an ordinary autumn day. I am in the kitchen cooking dinner and waiting for my husband to return from work. I put a pan on stove to boil water for pasta.

What does this daily routine have to do with me having stayed in the US? The answer is simple. People tend to keep more carefully the memories of very simple details and regular things that have happened in their lives because these memories are just theirs, it's their treasure that does not belong to anyone else. So when I catch myself staring at the pan while cooking as if I could make its contents boil faster I start repeating: "A watched pot never boils", and I can't stop myself from smiling. There's nothing special about this English proverb, we have a very similar one in Russian. But for some reason it has been with me all that time since I heard it from my host Mom, when I came to stay with her in 2005. Something you are waiting for will not happen while you are concentrating on it – that's the deep meaning of these words and it's a piece of a good advice to follow in life.

Today the bright sun is shining through the white autumn clouds. The trees behind the windows gossip about their sweet summer memories and boast of their new yellow-orange-red dresses. September is their most favorite month. They get a chance to change an ordinary green dress into a very fancy one and to show their identity as they appear before each other in their brand-new cloths. September is a special month for me as well – now even more special than it used to be.

The academic year in Russia starts on the 1st of September. It has always been a holiday for me – at school and throughout my college life. Nowadays I work at the University where I teach Arabic Language and Grammar for freshmen so the first day of September has become a part of my professional life.

Could I imagine myself in this place almost 10 years ago when I came to the US to stay with the American family and improve my English skills? Of course not, but that year gave me so much strength and life energy as well as knowledge that from that time on I began to think that everything is possible. However success is a tricky thing. You better not give it too much attention otherwise you might have to wait longer for the result. Just do your best and never doubt – what is meant to happen is going to happen.



The experience that I gained during my stay in the US is my past, my present and my future. In the past I learned not to be afraid of the new things and to jump on every opportunity life gives you. As a U-high school student I took a class of AP Chemistry and my host Mom had to pick me up very late in the evening on Wednesdays because it was our laboratory day. I got a chance to work in the University labs and carry out complicated experiments using the equipment that the students in my school in Russia could only dream about. Since that time I've never been in a chemistry lab again, my job is very far from natural science, but that class taught me accuracy, thoroughness and patience. Living in a different country, staying with strangers is a challenge for a teenager. But this experience taught me to get along with the people of other culture, to respect their habits, interests and particularities, to accommodate myself to the new environment. Five years later when I went to study in

Cairo University for my senior year of college I was aware of what to expect and had no fear.

In the present I check Facebook every day to catch up on the latest family news - I have family in the US that I can't keep in touch with on a regular basis, but I want to share their joy and sorrows, to see how their kids grow and to know what they are up to these days. I feel calm and confident each morning after I call my parents, email my in-laws and check the news on Facebook.

Even my conjugal life, my future is bonded with my foreign exchange experience. My beloved husband met me in college, we took English class together. And on the first day of class he obviously did not expect anyone in the group to announce to him having been to the States. As we figured out later we went to the US the same academic year of 2005-2006, and during that time we lived even closer to each other than in Russia (my husband's hometown is in Yakutia – the far eastern district of Russia, it's about 6000 km from Moscow).

A teenage girl with a pony-tail and wide-open eyes who came back from the US full of impressions and energy still lives in me and every day encourages me to greater things.