

## Quests

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Speak to me, muse, of the adventurous man who wandered long after he left the sacred citadel of home, and of the lands of Rus to which he traveled as they fractured and collided.

Mrs. Hibbard led our first-grade class to the Mt. Washington School hallway that autumn of 1954. We squatted on the cold tile floor and scrunched our heads downward. Even at age six, I doubted this would save us from an atom bomb. Who was our enemy? That question must have launched my quest to the lands of Rus.

At Princeton I majored in a now extinct subject, Soviet Studies. By 1966, the USA boasted thirty thousand nuclear warheads, and the Russians brandished ten thousand. I would study and meet these people who would bury us, or would we bury them, or would it end with no undertaker available? That I could do something to stop nuclear Armageddon – was this an impossible dream? But impossible dreams are the mission of each true knight.

With zephyrs of détente blowing east in the summer of 1969, Icelandic Air sailed Withrow classmate Dave and me to Luxembourg, where I bought a Volkswagen Squareback. We drove north, dodging reindeer herds above the Arctic Circle, then south to Helsinki before turning east toward the foreboding border of the Soviet Union. With visas and prepayment made for foreigner-only campgrounds each of forty nights ahead, we entered Russia. I wondered if our West German license plates trumpeted one of the first penetrations into Russia by a German vehicle since Panzers of the Reich blitzkrieged toward the siege of Leningrad. On a bumpy two-lane road encased by dense birch and pine forest, a projectile struck to shatter our windshield into chunks of plexiglass. A loose stone? An omen to turn back? The USSR had no VW repair

shops. We strapped on aviator goggles to shield splats of mosquitoes for three thousand kilometers.

To write a thesis about the Soviet school history program, I acquired the first through tenth grade textbooks read by every Soviet child of the 1960's, including Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. A teacher I interviewed recalled a morning in 1956 when every instructor received the same order. She directed her class to open their books and rip out and hand to her for disposal pages about Stalin. These would be replaced by newly defined правда, translated as truth, but its deep meaning that of a fusion of verity and justice.

Soviet history taught that humanity moved by inexorable Marxist forces on a railroad of socialism toward the terminal bliss of communism. Russia would lead the world toward the glorious finish line. But reactionary western forces aimed to derail the train to glory. Победа, victory, would come only through obedience to party leadership. This was the Russian Empire in its Marxist-Leninist avatar. Premier replaced Tsar. Comrade replaced serf. Party replaced patriarch. Communism replaced Russian Orthodoxy. America became archenemy after Mongols, Teutonic Knights, Lithuanians, Swedes, Poles, French, and Germans, invaders of the lands of Rus over a millennium.

That summer I saw babushkas kiss icons on monastery walls, watched with a proletarian audience Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov, gazed upon a glowing embalmed Lenin, guzzled tumblers of vodka. The Kremlin encircled an autocrat's power as it had since the rise of the Ivans and three Romanov centuries. Bookstores sold Pushkin and propaganda, but shoots of protest sprouted. Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn circulated on carbon paper as самиздат. Poets filled football stadiums and tested the censor. The ghosts of Peter and Catherine, both the Great,

moaned that Russia should again turn west on its quest. But Soviet Russia cemented its dominion to block the infection of foreign influence-a.

Moscow viewed itself as the third Rome. What would Russia be without an empire? And every empire must have its emperor. A chronicler at the time of Ivan Grozny, Ivan IV, wrote how Russia's tsar must be feared. "A realm without dread is like a horse beneath a Tsar without a bridle." Stalin and Putin inherited this message.

Communism became Russia's mirage of the golden age, a magnetic destiny more powerful than bourgeois existence. As Dostoevsky wrote, "The Golden Age is the most implausible of all the dreams that ever have been. ... [W]ithout it the people will not live and cannot die." That summer showed me the Soviet dream's implausibility.

On what was then called Lenin Hills, where Moscow State University rose like a yeasty wedding cake above a grey cloud of industrial pollution, I asked our blond Intourist guide, "Как сказать по-русски, smog?" She smiled and answered in perfect English, "There is no smog under socialism."

Dave and I crammed in a crowd around a storefront black and white TV to watch Neil Armstrong land on the moon. Muscovites celebrated, knowing that they had launched the first satellite, man, and woman into space.

We left Moscow heading for Kiev, the city where Rus arose over a thousand years ago, probably from a Viking word for where Norwegians settled along the Dnieper. Kievan Rus became the spiritual center of Slavic Christianity until the Mongols sacked Kiev in 1240 and the Moscow Grand Duchy evolved into Rus's heart as the Tsardom of Russia. Every fifty kilometers our Squareback slowed for a mandatory checkpoint where a guard with pen and clipboard recorded our license plate. I elected to test the system and raced through one at sixty kilometers

an hour instead of the posted limit of ten. The guard leapt onto his motorcycle and flashed us to halt. He approached, rifle strapped across his back.

“Passport!” he barked.

We presented American passports, shrugged, and pretended to speak no Russian.

He grinned and shouted, “Moonmen, moonmen!” He shook our hands and waved us on.

We experienced that few took their jobs too seriously in the Soviet Union. The unwritten bargain was that you pretended to work, and the government pretended to pay you. There was little to buy with rubles, but foreigners could purchase luxury items like Oreos and Pepsi Cola in a Берёзка, open to those with dollars but not to ordinary residents. We traded blue jeans for icons and swapped dollars for rubles at six times the official rate, both serious crimes. We couldn't take the rubles beyond the border, so we splurged at restaurants for the elite, who wondered why long-haired kids were feasting in their caviar getaways.

As we prepared to board a ferry from Odesa to Istanbul, we stuffed our purloined icons into bags of квас, a powder to make instant beer. The guards searched but didn't probe the powder bags, or we might have visited a gulag.

I finished *The Brothers Karamazov* on the steamship, thinking that Russia would have been eerily familiar to Dostoevsky if he returned from the dead house. With private enterprise banned, individuals owned virtually nothing. The sporadic little that grocery stores offered were single items – like “Toothpaste” as the only available toothpaste, Cuban sugar as “sugar.” Literacy and science beamed, and the Soviet Union became recognized as one of two heralded super-powers. But life was a grinding grey.

I witnessed a decaying system. Soviet history books bred boredom and conformity disconnected from the world. Because property belonged to no one, no one took care of it. If

правда could be ripped from a book and replaced at the leader's dictate, what was truth? Russia was a glacier, frozen and treacherous to strangers and other deviants.

America too was iced within a Cold War. Each country funded proxy battles and perfected systems to deliver nuclear bombs that could end human existence. Our cultures separated from each other as far apart as this world and the next. There was nothing to be done. I would go home again, become a lawyer, have a family. I would not be Odysseus or Don Quixote, not then.

Two decades later sirens sang again from the lands of Rus, this time not of civil defense but of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (reform and restructuring).

In 1988 Cincinnati sought a Soviet sister city. Ukraine's second largest city Kharkov became our match. As founding president of the Cincinnati Kharkov Sister Cities Project, I led a delegation of forty-seven to the Soviet Union. We toured the Hermitage museum with our hosts. The great-great-grandfather of Cincinnati delegate Michael Ilyinsky was Tsar Alexander II. Michael's grandfather, the Grand Duke Dmitri, hosted Rasputin's murder and for that was fortuitously exiled in 1916. Michael was, we think, the first Romanov to return to Russia since Lenin seized power. Konstantin Khirniy, Governor and First Communist Party Secretary of the Kharkov Област (region), walked with us through the hall of jewel-studded, gold encrusted imperial coaches.

As we stood together, Michael said, "We had too much."

Konstantin said, "We went too far."

We signed a Protocol in Kharkov City Hall, with a bust of Lenin presiding, in the same building destroyed in 2022 by Russian missiles. In 1990 we brought offerings of ourselves.

Executives of Multicolor and Procter & Gamble and I presented a “how to do private business” seminar for gray-suited Soviet managers and a few brave souls who launched “collectives,” the Gorbachev era experiment with privately owned shops and restaurants. Afterward, a barrel-bodied gentleman with nicotine-stained teeth whispered to us that he listened to our words about how prices are set in a free market, but “tell me, please, **who** sets prices in America?” After we repeated that each business owner decides, he said, “Okay, but please, just between us, who is person who sets prices?”

I wrote articles about life in America for Газета, the City’s newspaper. I asked for payment to make a cultural point. My first story earned five rubles. I received Soviet press credentials and a Sberbank passbook to hold my earnings, Sberbank being the sole Soviet savings bank. On a trip after Ukraine became independent, I was handed the passbook as a souvenir. Inflation had raged, and my 377-ruble account was worthless. Millions of Soviets lost their life Sberbank savings when the Soviet Union vanished.

The USSR ended by accident on Christmas day, 1991 from a power squabble between Yeltsin and Gorbachev. Yeltsin declared Russia free of the Union and took control of the Russian Federation, lowering the Kremlin’s Soviet red flag and raising the Russian tricolor. Ukraine and the other republics immediately declared independence. Overnight, Gorbachev headed a Union with no republics. One country became fifteen. This was not victory in a Cold War but the abrupt close of the Soviet phase of Russian Empire, as though the gods scrambled borders to see what mortals would do in the confusion. Wars of succession commenced, as they do when empires crumble.

In a magician’s proof, Україна (Ukraine is its exonym) became a nation. Україна – a name evolved from the Slavic or Polish phrase for borderland or edge. Kharkov became the

Ukrainian Kharkiv. Some mistook the early nineties for the wild west, but no marshal with a tin badge appeared. Anarchy reigned in what Marx would have regarded as a backslide into the embryonic stage of capitalism. Russia staggered like a wounded bear, acting as though she lost her cubs. Ukraine was born without adoption papers, free for its own quest.

Returning to an abruptly independent Ukraine in 1992, I visited my friend Eugene Roulko, international law professor at Kiev's Institute of International Relations. Eugene came to America in the 1980's on a Fulbright, never having seen a U.S. dollar. He created a private law firm in Kiev when this was permitted for the first time in 1992, while retaining his prestigious professorship. In Kiev, I stayed in a ten-story historic building where his family of four and an overfed cat that looked ready to explode occupied a cramped apartment, the toilet squeezed into a narrow closet next to the kitchen. After I lost my dress shoes on an overnight train from Russia, Eugene took me to the world's largest flea market – Kiev's circular football stadium, a huge concrete spiral transformed into stalls for anyone to sell anything. Babushkas sold heirlooms, bras, shoes, and jewelry for what they could get to survive. I probably could have bought a nuclear device but settled for black leather shoes for five U.S. dollars.

Individuals grabbed what they could however they could, the state unable to control the scramble. Kleptocrats snatched state enterprises and commodities. Eugene shared a story of his engagement by his client, Ukraine's Export-Import Bank. It had lent millions to an instant entrepreneur who tried to refurbish three of the world's largest military transport aircraft into private cargo planes. When he failed, Eugene was assigned to collect. In Soviet times, Eugene had earned about \$60 a month from his teaching post and served the Bank at no charge. With the country independent, he asked what his fee would be. The Bank responded in the uncharted world of privatized legal practice that Eugene could keep ten percent of whatever he recovered.

He sold the three planes for \$13 million to Abu Dhabi, earning \$1.3 million offshore. Ukraine did not tax offshore income, so Eugene became an instant hard currency millionaire.

I resolved with Eugene to promote the rule of law in the new country. When Ohio Chief Justice Tom Moyer wrote that Ohio should help an eastern European country after the Iron Curtain fell, I proposed Ukraine. The Chief, his wife, the Ohio Bar President, and I flew to Kiev. Together with Ukraine's Chief Justice, we created the Ohio Ukraine Rule of Law Program, bolstered by federal funding. Ukrainian and Ohio jurists and lawyers hosted each other on study tours. The Ukrainians experienced an independent judiciary, observing jury trials, mediations, criminal trials where sometimes the government lost. They saw how independent courts are guardrails for life without corruption.

One night after a Cincinnati dinner and drinks, I asked a Ukrainian judge privately what his salary was. He reported that it had doubled from about \$50 a month in Soviet times to \$100. I furrowed my brow and asked in jest, "How can you tell if a Ukrainian judge is honest?"

"Oh, there are two kinds of judges," he quietly explained. "One will take your money and rule in your favor. The other will take your money and go to the other side to see if it will offer more."

I nodded.

"And I am an honest judge," he said, then toasted with his glass of imported Совѣтское шампанское (Sovetskoye Shampanskoye).

Eugene shared a story about a Ukrainian metal plant whose general manager took control of it in the name of a company he created. Eugene was dispatched to collect for the Export Import Bank on an overdue loan to a state-owned company. He filed suit in a provincial court, then visited the judge, who stated the terms of private compensation. Eugene paid, and the judge

ordered the loan repaid. Two days later the judge reversed his ruling and declared that the manager's company that stole the plant owed nothing to the Bank, which could instead pursue the hollowed-out state-owned company. Eugene paid another visit and gratuity, and the judge reversed his order. Days later an opposite order appeared. Eugene then hired mercenaries who drove a Soviet transport carrier to the plant and pointed artillery barrels at the director's office. Eugene bullhorned, "You have five minutes to get out." So the matter was resolved, with the plant retitled to the Bank.

Spreading the rule of law was like climbing Everest in a swimsuit. I should have gleaned from Homer and Cervantes that there are quests that are best to avoid. But the true knight must not surrender. So I turned to bringing free enterprise to the rubble of the ruble. Lights were flashing orange, somewhere between yellow and red. Would I be viewed as a plundering capitalist imperialist, out for riches from the post-Soviet garage sale with no cashier? Was it hopeless to preach free enterprise to people with no capital or a free-market prayer book?

Noel and I teamed with Russian Television Channel 2 and American broadcast executives to create a TV series to be called *Ваше Дело* (It's Your Business). Anatoly, an anchorman for RT2's nightly news show, would host it, to entertain Russians about how to start and grow a private business. An American wedding planner would be the first episode, sure to captivate viewers with gowns, tuxedos, and celebrations of love.

After taping a pilot, we sought funding, but U.S. support focused on converting Russian defense plants to civilian production. Instead, Cincinnati hosted the manager of a Murmansk submarine plant that had zero orders from a bankrupt Russian Navy. He proposed supplying tourist submarines for the Ohio River. When we pointed at the muddy flow from our office window, he said, "We can make toasters." We couldn't get funding for *Ваше Дело* and gave up

the dream of promoting freedom through a TV reality show. Cincinnati didn't buy submarines or Arctic Circle toasters.

Like Odysseus fleeing the Cyclopean Isles, I sailed toward a new shore. We would inspire by doing. We would invest in joint ventures. Fellow Literarian Bill Sena and a few daring investors sent three young Americans to Ukraine and Russia to scout for opportunities in the frenzy of privatization.

In Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, we found the General Department Store, the only one in Soviet times. Federated, now called Macy's, agreed to send containers of women's fashion close-outs to a private company to be formed with this state-owned enterprise that was about to be privatized. As we prepared joint venture documents, the director asked that we invoice an Irish company for the goods, which would supply them on to the Russian store. While taking a sauna at the company's dacha, I asked why. The director explained that the Irish company he created was where profits would be made. It would sell the garments to the store at a much higher price, guaranteeing profits for him and losses for the Store.

He explained. The store received government subsidy to cover its losses. The more the store lost, the greater the subsidy it received to keep operations going. Profits had to be earned offshore, by the one most deserving – namely, the director. He would split the loot with us. And western fashion would come to Russia's women. After escaping the dacha, I wrote him that we could not proceed.

Anarchy and corruption haunted the lands of Rus. I should have fled for home. But surely the new Ukraine would offer more fertile land for planting the seeds of freedom.

The Mayor of Kharkiv introduced me to Irina at a sister city event. She ran a private business named Interior that made wooden furniture. With a team of retirees from Hudson, Ohio

led by Herb Kaatz, the Chairman of Oberlin College, we plunged into business with Interior. A wood-making hobbyist, Herb learned that Ukraine had an abundant wood supply, a woodworking tradition, and unemployment of half the population. He procured an advance order from an American rental furniture company for \$5 million of solid wood bunk beds.

We sent Interior working capital, materials, and purchase orders. But Interior's financials raised questions. The Soviet system required no cost accounting, so we provided software to track inputs. When the inventory column reported unexplainable figures, we confronted our Kharkiv partner. Irina tearfully confessed that she had paid available cash to the mafia that lent her funds to start Interior and threatened to kill her daughter.

We shifted to a state-owned plant in Iziium that once supplied beds for the Soviet Army. The factory employed three hundred workers to do nothing, because there were no orders from anyone for anything. We needed only nine workers and a corner of a cavernous plant to operate mass production equipment we supplied from Italy and Germany.

Herb hired four Ukrainians to run our own small team – a quality control expert, an accountant, a translator, and a big guy with a car. Herb flew there repeatedly to get the operation started. Samples were approved.

Our Kharkiv team of four suffered from Sovietitis. They sent a message asking who was the general director. Herb responded that they didn't need one, that their roles were clear, and they should act as a team. They faxed that by law there must be a general director. Herb replied, okay, I'm the general director, so get to work. They faxed – who will convene meetings? Herb replied, meet every Monday at 9 AM and report results. They faxed, who will set the agenda? Individual initiative and teamwork – not instinctive ideas. A Russian proverb held true – the highest nail gets hammered first.

Our joint venture rested on the improbable idea that the Iziium factory, with hundreds of men sitting about with little to do, would tolerate having nine selected to operate world-class machines to produce four ocean containers of beds a month. The plant's general director begged us to use everyone to make beds one at a time, an impossible request. We supplied all that the production required, including Swedish lacquer for the finish. On one visit, Herb noticed hand-made chairs in a corner that glowed with Swedish stain. He complimented the manager. Yes, that turned out well, agreed the manager. But ... isn't that our stain? said Herb. There was plenty, replied the manager. To him this was just borrowing.

The venture collapsed when the plant would not supply the staff to operate machines the unemployed personnel viewed as taking their jobs.

We invented a way for Ukrainians to avoid runaway inflation. We created the idea of currency risk reinsurance. Teaming an Indiana insurance company and Kharkiv's Salamandra Insurance Company, the new product allowed Ukrainians to buy with Ukrainian currency insurance that would repay with interest in US dollars. This joint venture lasted for about a year because the Indiana insurer had more immediate profit projections than the newly formed Kharkiv insurer could meet through sales.

Our joint-venture investment dream evaporated in total failure. Russia and Ukraine were like Don Quixote's windmills. Impossible dreams became recurring nightmares.

Our sister city project offered hope that change could come with time. Noel and I hosted as summer vacation guests the first democratically elected mayor of Kharkiv, his wife, and two children. The mayor granted our request on our first visit to restore a synagogue to religious use. Stalin had converted it into a gymnastics center. We think it was the first restoration of a synagogue to its proper use in independent Ukraine. Sister city exchanges led to marriages and

cross-border children. City and business professionals of Cincinnati and Kharkiv shared ideas and practices. School groups swapped life-changing visits.

Konstantin Khirniy, the final First Communist Party Secretary of the Kharkiv Област (region), signed the sister city agreement in Cincinnati but was out of power in 1992. He and Anna, who taught political economy at Kharkiv State University, hosted Noel and me for dinner at their modest apartment when he ruled. After 1992, Noel and I invited them to vacation with us in Cincinnati. Konstantin seemed shocked as an out-of-power communist official.

At their request, we toured our low-income areas where the Khirnyis expected to see dire poverty but found instead communities not unlike much of Kharkiv. We shopped at a Kroger superstore for dinner. “Which salad dressing would you like?” I asked, standing before shelves presenting multiple choices, brands, and blends. Anna looked stunned. That evening at dinner, she began to weep. I asked what was wrong. She said, “I taught lies for thirty years.”

When the Khirniys departed at the airport, I asked Konstantin what he would do upon return.

“I want to start Goodwill Industries in Ukraine,” he answered, inspired by a visit to a Goodwill store. And that is what he did.

There were unexpected compensations from my Russia quest. The person Kharkov elected as its representative in the first and last democratically elected congress of the Soviet Union was the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko. He became a friend. Zhenya came to Cincinnati twice to read poetry to packed halls. He stayed at our home and astonished our twin daughters by running shirtless and rolling in the snow during a January freeze.

With the USSR vanished, his own quest was in disarray. In a poem written as he traveled between an Oklahoma professorship and residence in what had been Pasternak's dacha at Peredelkino, a writers colony outside Moscow, he grieved in "Goodbye Our Red Flag":

"I didn't take the czars' Winter Palace.

I didn't storm Hitler's Reichstag.

I am not what you call a "Commie."

But I caress the Red Flag

and cry."

His final years became a lament for what might have been from the Soviet ruins. He told me that Russia's great mistake was taking fatal half-measures – like leaping across the Grand Canyon in several steps, he said.

I placed my Russia quest in a memory box. Today America and Russia each have arsenals of about six thousand nuclear warheads poised to vaporize one another in minutes. My impossible dreams were a fool's shipwreck.

But as I look back now in 2022, were they?

Over thirty years, the quests of Russia and Ukraine diverged and twisted into mortal combat. Both struggled for order from the miasma of Soviet collapse. For one, dreams of restored empire and the clutch of kleptocracy drove the new Tsar Vladimir as he aged. In the other, over thirty years democracy and western values took root and prevailed in the escape from empire and the quest for national meaning.

In 2004 Viktor Yanukovich, former Governor of the Donetsk region of the Donbas and then Prime Minister, was the Ukrainian regime's and Russian President Putin's candidate for president. He faced a run-off against Viktor Yushchenko, a reformer supported by the European

Union. Despite evidence that Yushchenko won, the regime's Election Commission declared Yanukovich the victor. In the Orange Revolution, massive crowds protested what they saw as a rigged result engineered by Russia and Ukraine's corrupt regime. In the decisive turning point, Ukraine's Supreme Court declared the vote count fraudulent and ordered a re-vote. Yushchenko won the second run-off handily despite being poisoned by dioxin after meeting with Russian officials during the campaign. Had our Ohio program inspired Ukraine's judiciary to act independently?

In 2010 Yanukovich was elected president. Three years later under Putin's pressure he abruptly refused to sign a political and free trade agreement with the European Union and instead chose closer ties to Russia and its Eurasian Economic Union. In the Maidan revolution, fearless crowds demanded that the European Union agreements be signed. Ukraine's military refused to support Yanukovich after he ordered troops to fire on the protesters, killing 97. He fled to the Donbas, then to Crimea, then to Russia, where he now lives in exile. Ukraine turned west. Putin annexed Crimea two months later. Did efforts of Europeans, Cincinnatians and countless others influence Ukrainians by sharing an alternative vision of what life can be?

In February 2022, when Ukraine resisted further Russian invasion, so did Kharkiv, just twenty-five miles from the Russian border. We zoomed with Kharkiv friends three days before the February invasion. One man in his sixties who had visited Cincinnati said he joined the civil defense force and was training on a submachine gun. None talked of needing rescue by Russia. Kharkiv thrived as a city rebuilt largely through private enterprise. Ukraine had elected a president who became a celebrity through a TV comedy series. It featured him as a hapless, unknown high school teacher who through a social media campaign by his students won the presidency with 67% of the vote on an anti-corruption promise. In the real election that followed,

Zelensky won over 70% of the vote. Ukraine's quest turned irrevocably west. Were people to people exchanges a factor? Were countless interactions with western investment and commerce a reason for Ukraine's westward quest?

The Russian dissident poet of the late Soviet period, Andrei Voznesensky, wrote how quests can be in his poem *Columbus*:

*Instinctively*

*head for the shore ...*

*Look for*

*India –*

*You'll find*

*America!*

Our journeys may end, as Yevtushenko wrote, "like the men in Napoleon's cavalry who threw themselves into the river to form a bridge over which others might cross to the other bank." Bridges we become can lead others, even nations, to new shores.

Near the end of the *Odyssey*, a seer delivers his prophecy as Penelope's doomed suitors dine. He foresees their slaughter and the future of Ithaca: "The Sun has been obliterated from the sky, and an unlucky darkness invades the world."

We gather tonight with deathly darkness across the lands of Rus and beyond. Nuclear threats are uttered. Russia and Ukraine battle over what they are and will become, and America and Europe define themselves in that bloody struggle.

I offer you no prophecy. Rather, I share my stories as drops into the stream of time, stories that swirl with countless others to form currents that fork for Russia and Ukraine, that rise and rage as torrents of empire and freedom. Darkness, like history, has no finality. There will be

light tomorrow in Ukraine and in Russia. Russia will search, as ever, between the pull of imperial glory and its dream of an exceptional role in the world and the tug of western liberties and European life. Russia is not Vladimir Putin. His time will pass.

And for us, is it time to quest once more before a titanium curtain drops and an internet barbed-wired fence arises to separate Russia's people and the West once more? As Russia quests for its next shore, will there be those who become human bridges for the flow of ideas and people on the eternal search for a better life?

Impossible or not, it is dreams that launch our quests. It is stories we gather on our journeys, and then bring home to share. These were mine to share with you. For as long as humans have gathered around campfires or communed around dacha tables, it is stories that lift and shape us. It is stories that become history.