



# TOLSTOY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

VOLUME V, NUMBER I

SPRING 2000

## RUSSIAN CHILDREN AT THE TF CENTER — REFLECTIONS

### *The Children Speak*

The *Alexandra Tolstoy Institute's* second exchange program at the TF Center took place in Winter 1999 and ran for 2-1/2 months. It provided a daily enrichment program to children, ages 10-16, from orphanages in Voronezh and Rossosh (Voronezh region). The children were immersed in a daily curriculum geared towards improving their English language skills, rekindling their own cultural and spiritual awareness and historical pride. They took a basic course in hands-on computer training made possible through a generous donation of computer equipment, and enjoyed choir singing, physical education and arts and crafts.

This semester proved to be even more challenging than the Krasnoyarsk cadet program held last summer because of the nature of the children involved. All the selected children came from dysfunctional families considered unfit to care for them. Despite this factor, yet another successful semester took place at the TF Center, as is evident in the numerous letters received from the children who participated in the program.

In the letters we have received so far from the children who returned to Russia in February, we

understand better the significant gain they experienced through their time here at the TF Center. One girl poignantly captures the impact the program had



*Fun times at the Tolstoy Foundation*

on her life when she writes; *"It seems to us that during the time we spent with you, we became kinder and more courteous. Now we have something to work towards and (know) how we must be and who to look to as an example. To believe in faith, hope and love."* This child expresses in her letter what we at the Tolstoy Foundation hope the children will take away from our program — a sense of direction and a new set of skills to navigate their way.

Often the staff at orphanages in Russia is forced

Мам кажется, что за границей  
приблизительно у вас в России мало стало  
добрых и внимательных.

Теперь у нас есть и чему обра-  
дуйтесь, у мамы есть и чему обра-  
дуйтесь пример. Верить в Америку,  
Россию и Любимых.

to care for twice the amount of children they are equipped to handle. As a result, the necessary guidance and psychological attention that are needed by each child are sacrificed. At the Tolstoy Foundation, we believe that our program provides this missing support and cultivates a focus in each child's life, so that once they are released from the orphanages at age 17 or 18, they have a better chance of succeeding. In addition, the *Alexandra Tolstoy Institute's* cultural and educational exchange program provides a sense of security in the children and offers a supplementary source of love and understanding. One orphan highlights this in a letter when she writes: "Thank you for that love which we lost in childhood, for your kindness and openness to us; once again, a huge thank you." Yet another child writes: "You were so kind to us, so attentive, so responsive, you always tried to understand us and to help us." Clearly, these children felt the community's genuine love for them and the community's unflinching commitment to them. Their lives have definitely been touched, as is illustrated in the following quote: "I am suddenly overwhelmed with memories, my eyes are full of tears. It was so good for us to have been with



ALEKSANDRA JANKE



(Top) Feeling at home at the TF Center. (Left) Children visit American school in McLean, VA

you."

It is the setting, the staff and the community involved that make the *Alexandra Tolstoy Institute's* cultural and educational exchange program unique and effective. One of the adults accompanying the children writes: "Our special thanks to you for all the kindness, the fairness, the patriotic spirit...that you cultivated in the children during your lessons. You are true forgers of children's souls—teachers with a capital 'T.'" He comments further: "For two and a half months we were your guests. During that time, we made the acquaintance of many wonderful people, glanced into the history and the traditions of a great country; yet, at the same time, we did not feel torn away from our native land, because Russian traditions are very alive and strictly preserved in the Foundation."

## *The Community Speaks*

Спасибо Вам за ту любовь которую  
мы получили в детстве за  
Ваши доброту и отзывчивость  
еще раз Огромное спасибо.

Deep bonds formed between the Voronezh and the Rossosh orphans, and the many generous and caring people who met them through our "God-parent" program. Since the children's departure in February, there has been a constant exchange of letters and phone calls strengthening these relationships. This is evident in a letter from one of the adults accompanying the children, who writes: *"Thank you, everyone, for not forgetting us, for your telephone calls for your interest (in us). You are real teachers, who understand so well the delicate soul of a child."* These exchanges are an extremely vital and distinctive component of our program, which require your continued support.

Those involved in the program witnessed an evolution in the children. Over the course of the semester, the once reticent and quiet orphans became talkative and assertive children. Svetlana A. Umrichin, one of our program's teachers, movingly describes the sentiments of the children when they first arrived: *"We had our lessons in cozy carpeted surroundings, as the children snuggled into the sofas and the chairs. Two of the girls always sat on either side of me. From time to time, they would affectionately cuddle up to me. At first,*



*Community interaction at the TF Center*

*some of them were puzzled: "Why is everyone being so nice to us? Is it really true that you've grown to love us?"* Often, there were doubts: *"No one will invite us over! Who needs us? We'll go back and that'll be the end! You'll forget us!"* Soon these questions were no longer asked, and Svetlana V. Monastyrski notes: *"They were also shy about showing their feelings, i.e. to hug or to kiss us; maybe they were not used to the warmth of family life. But after 3-4 weeks, they were hugging us and kissing us and calling us 'grand-mothers'."* Establishing a mutual trust made the physical and verbal demonstration of emotions, as described above, possible.

On most weekends, if the children weren't off on a fieldtrip to New York City or visiting Washington D.C., they stayed with families and couples in the commu-

nity involved in the "God-parent" program. One of the adults accompanying the children expresses his contentment and the children's appreciation for this unique facet to the program when he writes: *"I would like to express gratitude and appreciation to those families with whom the children visited. There is nothing more joyous than seeing smiles and eyes full of joy on children's faces, a yearning to share one's joy and one's impressions from meetings with such interesting and kind people."*

People who hosted the children shared some of their experiences and feelings as well. Nancy Esposito writes: *"This was an exercise in ESL1, sign language, and simple love. It was an incredible learning experience to see two children who, on day*

*one, ate whatever was put in front of them, who in no way showed likes or dislikes, turn into laughing, free-spirited, decision-making, constant fruit-eating little girls."* Irene M. Mesernicky knowingly describes her interactions with one of the children: *"She is an amazingly calm, quiet and introverted person, who nonetheless managed to win me over with her slightly proud, yet also sensitive heart, after she sensed my desire to show my compassion for her, to nurture her, and to give her as much joy and satisfaction as possible. I was fortunate that we were able to understand each other, and my meeting her will forever remain with me as a warm memory."*

There are numerous ways for these children to benefit from the *Alexandra Tolstoy Institute's* cultural and educational exchange program. Larissa and Nicholas Chouprakow believe that *"most important is that (through the program) the children realized that there is love and goodness in the world."* They go on to confirm how deeply invested

our community is in these children when they write: *"May the spark of hope never fade in them! May God help them to preserve a pure spirit and to grow up to be strong and beautiful people in our Motherland."* In addition to the good that the children receive, the community benefits greatly as well. George N. Doroshin writes: *"The presence of those dear children warmed our hearts, especially those who do not have children or grandchildren of their own."* By feeling needed, people in the

community derive a new sense of purpose. Everyone who is critical to the program gains from the experience—the children and the community.

Serge and Anastasia Lopoukhine share their thoughts on what they trust the children take away from their time at the TF center: *"But what we*

*believe will be remembered most, perhaps for the rest of their lives, are the smiles, the gentleness and the good will of people whom the children met for a brief, warm moment, in a foreign land."* Coming to the United States was a completely new experience for the children. They had their own expectations and preconceived notions, and in 2-1/2 months, these ideas were either confirmed or enriched or dispelled. Undeniably, the 18 orphans from Voronezh and Rossosh learned great life lessons. Lubov and Konstantin Kostukevich touch upon one of the most vital of all lessons: *"Both this group from Voronezh and Rossosh and the first group of cadet boys left the best impression on us—first, because of their courteous behavior and their talents; but also because of their openness to learning new things. Our wish for them is that they will always remain so warm and so sincere and will become an example to others. We are certain that they realize that this is now their purpose and mission."*



*Alexandra Tolstoy Institute Commencement*

ALEXANDRA JARUL

## SOUL MATES

*In every person's life there are events that forever leave their wonderful imprint.*

*One wants to remember them, over and over again, to imagine speaking again with the very people whom we remember and love.*

*Such a memorable event was the arrival at the TF Center of a group of children from Voronezh and Rossosh. The anticipation of the children's arrival was in itself exciting. Busy, loving hands of all TF staff prepared the student dorms; the cultural program, the visits, and the lesson plans were also carefully planned.*

*What kind of children were these, who had grown up without parents, with little warmth and affection in their lives? What would they think and feel upon arriving in a foreign land, yet one which eagerly awaited them?*

*Finally, the long-awaited moment came! Their dear, smiling, open faces shone with joy at being welcomed by so many people, both old and young, whose faces also radiated joy. "Welcome to America! How good it is to see you at the Tolstoy Foundation!"—such sentiments were heard from one and all.*

*We were impatient for Friday to come, to welcome some of the girls from Rossosh in our home, to talk warmly with them about their thoughts and dreams, to share with them the warmth and the stability of family life, and to shield*

*them from all the storms of life.*

*Valyusha, Natasha and Nastya were the 3 girls who visited with us in our home. At first, the girls were shy; but seeing that we had 3 sis-*

*.....*  
**Welcome to America!**  
*.....*

*.....*  
**How good it is to**  
*.....*

*.....*  
**see you at the**  
*.....*

*.....*  
**Tolstoy Foundation!**  
*.....*

*ters in our own family, they came alive and opened up. We instantly became friends, because they were such interesting, knowledgeable and gifted girls. One of them danced and sang very well; another knitted; and the third was a good artist. Good for them! We learned many interesting things about their lives in the internet, about their teachers, and about what fun they have on weekends and evenings. They had read so many excellent books! An entire library! I was so thrilled that all of us children know how to pass time in such a joyous and happy way, that we value friendship, and want to be good students so that we can be successful in life!*

*The Christmas preparations were truly memorable! We bought a tree that we all picked out together, after many discussions about which was taller and which*

*was fuller. Then we decorated it late into the night with beautiful ribbons and decorations. It took some good old Russian native wit to help us decorate the entire room in a festive way. Afterwards, we sat by the fireplace and talked about miracles, about Santa Claus, about whether or not wizards really live in this world and why everyone, old and young alike, loves stories. The evening turned out to be wonderful, magical! We all felt as if we'd known each other for a 100 years.*

*In the morning, our girlfriends found brightly wrapped, colorful gifts waiting for them under the tree.*

*Those 2-1/2 months passed as but a moment in time. Each of the girls and boys will remain always in my heart. I remember each and everyone one of them; and because my sister and I spent Christmas vacation at the TF Center, I was able to get to know each of their personalities. A huge thank-you to all those who made this fairy-tale come true for me.*

*We do not bid you farewell, our dear Voronezh friends. Parting is but the beginning of a new journey. Until our next wonderful meeting, girls and boys! Life goes on, and I know surely that all the very best is yet to come for all of us!*

*—BY KATIA TERENTIEV, age 16  
(on behalf of the entire family)*

## IN CHANGING ONE LIFE TOGETHER, WE ARE CHANGING MANY...

### WE NEED YOUR HELP...

Orphans have become a serious problem for post-Soviet Russia. Their numbers have climbed in direct proportion to the swift decline in living standards and the accompanying social turmoil. Despite the grim statistics and the social and economic situation in Russia, we believe that these children can succeed in life. In fact, we know it. But they need a special environment, one that offers stimulating and attentive surroundings where these children can discover their own unique talents and focus.

### WE NEED YOUR HELP...

As you have just read, the *Alexandra Tolstoy Institute* benefits promising orphan children between the ages of 10 and 16. We provide an educational and cultural experience with the goal of helping these children gain a sense of direction, support and hope. Our program acts as a powerful transformational catalyst that unlocks a new perspective for these children.

### WE NEED YOUR HELP...

In a semester, these children come to realize that they are needed by our community and by their country, and that we are investing in their future. This provides an incentive for them to succeed. At the TF Center, these children thrive in the dedicated, caring community that helps them to realize their potential. They emerge more optimistic about life and with an improved sense of self. This is evidenced in the letters you have had the chance to read in the preceding pages. Come join us and share in the giving.

## WE NEED YOUR HELP... THE TOLSTOY FOUNDATION

- PROMOTES** educational/ skills enhancement exchange programs at the TF Center
- ESTABLISHES** counseling centers and 24-hour hotlines for orphan and homeless children in the Voronezh and the Tula regions
- SUPPORTS** the distribution of vitamins/minerals and prenatal supplements to baby homes and orphanages in Voronezh, Rossosh and Tula
- SPONSORS** "God-parent" programs for orphan children
- ENCOURAGES** other educational and self-help initiatives and scholarship programs to benefit orphan children

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The Tolstoy Foundation is classified as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue code.

Copies of the Annual Report may be obtained at the above address

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PRINTED BY  
*News of the Highlands, Inc.*  
Cornwall, N.Y.  
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