

My impressions:

IX INTERNATIONAL humanistic school

Toni Van Pelt

I.

Just finished another presentation at the summer school, conducted by the Moscow State University and the Russian Humanist Society. The lecture was attended by ten men and four women. I discussed with them the dangers that porn brings to society, and the topic has caused quite a mixed reaction. I decided to start recording his impressions while they are still fresh in my memory. Students, four women, Russian women, white, aged between twenty and thirty years. Men: one person - from Iran, one - from Turkmenistan, other Russians between the ages of twenty to fifty years. Some of the students - undergraduate and graduate students, there are teachers and professors.



Some of those present is not the first time participate in an international summer school, initiated mainly humanists. Someone even went to the United States and was a member of the International Summer School, organized by Paul Kurtz at the Center for Studies (Amherst, USA). Our team of lecturers consists of our leader, Valery Kuvakin, MSU professor of philosophy, Jupe Shreyfërsa (white gay man, a scientist and a writer from Amsterdam), Norman Allen (African American, man, historian, editor of "Perspectives of man" (publication of the Institute of Science and . reason, Buffalo, USA), and I, the Director of public Relations of the Institute of

science and reason (white woman, feminist, St. Petersburg, Florida) it turned out that all of us, foreigners are public men, and this is our life choice: me, feminists, Norma - defender of the rights of the black US people of color, and Jupe - a talented storyteller, optimistic and cheerful person. Our fates and we ourselves seem to most listeners pretty exotic. I doubt that many of them met the people of this unusual way of life..

For ten days we live in a small village Subotiv located from Moscow about two hours away by car, and twenty kilometers from the town of Kolomna. Here in the House gumanizmamy we remain overnight, eat and spend our classes. This house was created mainly through the efforts Valery

Kuvakin, this Russian Paul Kurtz. He is very energetic and cheerful in his 73 years. On the porch waving two flags - the Russian Federation and UNESCO, the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization. In the house - large political map of the world. The rooms are numerous shelves filled with books. The house is very suitable for such events. In it three bathrooms, two shower, separate for men and women. Each of the four bedrooms three comfortable beds. This large bedroom with bookcases. Downstairs in the hall for meetings plush toy - a pink elephant, who holds Russian flag and girded ribbon with the inscription "Russia - the birthplace of the Russian Geographical Society" (I did not understand what the words mean). On one of the walls - a gallery of photos within, among them Nobel Prize winner Vitaly Ginzburg, the dean of the Philosophy Faculty of Moscow State University, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Vladimir Mironov, Paul Kurtz, as well as the well-known Russian philosopher and the organizers of the Society. The house has a lot of good photos and black and white prints with the image of the surrounding area.

I make my notes and simultaneously listen to a fascinating lecture by Dutchman Joop Shreyfërsa, talking about a new concept of the supervising (suveillance) and samonadzirayuschego (selfveillance) digital society. She just opens her eyes for most of us that is happening around. It would seem that we are aware of the extent of that what he says, but he shows us a modern society with such angles of view, which we have not thought of before. He has traveled the world to watch the changing society. He showed us that we are moving from the world of hope and optimism in a world full of fear and negativity. He drew attention to the fact that society is a sign of the decline of the transformation of cities in the trampled earth (I think Detroit - one of those cities). Tagged comparison.



But to return back to our house Russian humanism. Wooden kitchen table is very long, it is slightly unstable along the bench and the little stools to sit on them. The food is simple and good. We are fortunate that Tanya's sister Valeria, take care of us. She has a beautiful garden with vegetables and herbs. Among the food on the table lemons, pears, apples, cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, dill, parsley, carrots, potatoes, beets, and so on. D. As you can imagine, salads are always very fresh. Every morning I see her in the garden, collecting to the table that we will have during the day. Salads are manifold, including seafood. Meat is mainly processed sausages (we call them hot dogs), and short (sausages, big and fat), salami, sausage and other meat, good cheese. All this is served for breakfast, and for lunch (for us it's lunch) and dinner (what we call the dinner). There is also a delicious homemade pickles, four kinds of homemade jams: apple, raspberry, strawberry and chërnosmorodinovy. I'm not familiar with all of this may have been more cranberries and some other berries, including purple grapes (gooseberries - *annotated ed.*). We usually ate breakfast hard boiled eggs. Tanya cooked wonderful omelets with sausage or sausage. Every morning, preparing porridge. Surprisingly, for me, butter and bread seemed not very good. The bread was plain white and black was not tasty.

For lunch we served fried fish, pork chops, chicken breasts and eggplant, hot and cold soups. It turned out to be delicious soup. It turns out, is not served cold as I thought, and hot. Really delicious! Sour cream is served with salads, soups and other dishes. We also ate a great stew of fried chicken. As a side dish we usually give buckwheat, but also rice and noodles. We enjoy fried potatoes, pasta with butter, not the sauce. Delicious!



Water for drinking has always been boiled. Mineral water bottles provided salt and without ice. Quite unusual for Americans. Often the majority of home-made drinks - lemonade and other fruit drinks - were served at room temperature. Tanya did every day fresh lemonade and other fruit drinks. Tea was a time of well-deserved pleasure after each meal and at bedtime. Russian, I thought, a small coffee lovers. The house was instant coffee, but drinking less.

Carbonated drinks were few. At the banquet was a Coca-Cola and other drinks are unknown to me. There was another beverage made from grain, too fizzy, but he (kvass - .. *Annotated ed*) I

do not like. We did not drink alcohol, except for the last farewell party. There was wine in cartons and bottles. At home, I do not drink wine, but white wine seemed to me very tasty. Yes, we had a wonderful dinner with wine and vodka! It was spoken many, many toasts were laughter and applause. Especially for the banquet are four or five people prepared barbecue in the open air and an open fire. Kebab was very fragrant.

In the morning, the weather in the vicinity of the House of humanism cool. Inside the house it was warm in the morning, becoming hotter in the afternoon, and by evening became cool again. We had to wear pants and jackets. Sunrises here early and late sunsets - Light to 10.30 pm. For long walks after school it was very convenient. Every day, hardly any two or three times a day we walked around the neighborhood and small and large groups, sometimes I walked alone. Closely communicating, we learned a lot about each other, discussing the lecture, asking questions of each other, sometimes disputed, or even made fun of each other, we begin to see the similarities and differences between us. Yes, we have a lot in common, but we have a very different experience. In many ways, the thinking Russian conservative. They are not interested in the issues of birth control and abortion, assuming they are not your problems, and the case of medical or law enforcement. At some point I realized that most of the participants of the school are, or will become leaders in their respective regions. One of the women, I learned, had just completed work on a textbook on humanism.

II.

When I asked about a pink elephant recently received a message from Valery Kuvakin. He writes that it is a kind of joke. In their country there is a saying, "Russia - the native land of elephants". So the elephant, the more pink appeared the Russian Humanist Society. But since in reality in Russia is too cold climate, the elephant it is not, especially pink. Therefore, the meaning of an elephant with a ribbon, "Russia - the native land of elephants" means that the humanist organization was born, against all odds, despite all the dashing Russian Orthodoxy to communism and communism to Orthodoxy.



In Russia, the new rules regulating the activities of non-governmental organizations have recently been adopted. Moscow says it wants to limit the influence of foreign financing of political activity in the country. But NPR¹ reported that the new rules are unfair and the government uses them against its critics. This happened about two weeks before our arrival. I have received letters from worried friends. There I was told in

Russian, five people at the last minute canceled his participation in the summer school. For one answered his father, saying that his son was suddenly taken ill and can not respond personally. The atmosphere of fear is still palpable in the country, although on the surface, everything seems calm. The Russians - the participants of the school concerned and most talked about bribery and corruption, which has reached alarming proportions in Russia. All this they call the Russian mafia. They argue that it is almost impossible to start, develop and maintain a small business, because of the enormous size of bribes required by the authorities. This was confirmed to me one of the students a week later. They are very concerned about the direction in which the country is moving. We had a great conversation about American imperialism and the discussion about the role of the Federal Reserve System, which prints the dollars. I think the same as I was brought up in the fear of the Russian because of the "cold war", the Berlin Wall and Red Square filled with soldiers, tanks and irremovable management, and Russian also grew in the atmosphere of fear. I think the important thing is what we have achieved through the search for peace in the world - is not only to overcome nationalism. We realized that the world - it is planetary, combining all problem. But, unfortunately, the more I am here, in this country, the more it becomes obvious to me that Russia is on the verge of another dictatorship.

We started our education program on 26 July. Every day we have breakfast around 8.15 in the morning and start the first lecture at 9:00. The lecture lasts two hours, in essence it is repeated twice, once in English and Russian on the back. Many in the audience to understand in English by ear and even better - written on a large screen TV. This helped to debate and discuss what they saw before his eyes. The Americans knew only English, lecturer from Amsterdam - the Dutch, German and English. We did not speak in Russian, so all the lectures were given in English and translated into Russian. For the Russian it was also a lesson in the English language, but sometimes it was tiring, though a necessary procedure. After the first lecture was made a short break and begins the second lecture, which lasted until lunch.

By this time the day came the heat. While on the wall in the hall there is a big and good air-conditioning, it includes rare. When this issue was solved immediately begin to argue as in the stadium between fans, someone was for the inclusion, someone afraid to catch a cold, was against it. Furthermore, as is usually the case, after a hearty dinner, and it is difficult to speak and listen. It is well known, as is the case, do not have time to close my eyes as you feel that the chin drops to the chest, and you open your eyes wide. And then, while you struggle with this, his eyes closed again ... All the students are aware of this.

Norm, Jupe and I succeeded each other during the day and read the latest Valeri, the fourth lecture before dinner. But after dinner is done either presentation or watching a movie, or vidiolektsiya Paul Kurtz. It was a very long day for all of us.

Almost every day, just before dinner some of us were bathing in the local river Osënka, which winds along the entire village. Bathing was simply divine. A few days later one of the students

called me, as he put it, to the competition. I rejected his offer, saying that I am a good swimmer, but I do not swim fast, so I'm not his rival. When he offered it to me for a second time and asked him why he wants to compete with me, he was a little embarrassed and sheepish smile on his face said that he just wants to beat me in swimming.

Among us often there are discussions about the male and female hormones and about who is stronger, man or woman. The controversy fueled held in these days the World Competition. Most watched competitions before going to bed almost every night. I was interested to see how the Russians perceive the Olympics. I talked a lot about women's participation in the Olympic Games, including their participation in the 2012 Olympics. I clarified the position of the feminists and their struggle for access and equitable participation of women in the



Olympic Games, about discrimination against them by the example of a participation one athlete from Saudi Arabia, which was allowed to run only in clothes, completely covering her body.

We discussed career Cheryl Haworth. I read them a fragment of annotations dedicated her film "Strong": "The twelfth generation of patriots of America, a visual artist with 14 years, the American champion of the 2008 Olympic Games, it is in the elite of world-class champions. Terrible figure in weightlifting. Its rating - the highest among all US participants in the Olympics." As I expected, many men began to doubt what I said. Girls smiling ...

Then men began to argue that women are strong only in synchronized swimming. I suggested that perhaps the men's teams in the synchronized swimming is not because they are afraid to lose women in the sport. Some men have suggested that testosterone makes males more than females. I said that I recently read an article that estrogen makes women as strong; is a female hormone, but the result of their actions is the same. One of the participants of the School, Professor of Medicine, a specialist in the field Vsevolod Lyashenko wanted to make a comment. Valery hardly calms the audience: "Let's hear what the doctor says about hormones." The doctor smiles at me and says, "Tony strong personality. She is strong in many ways." The controversy soon subsided. He is a good man. We often go on walks together and talked about a lot. He has broad and kind smile.

But let's go further.

The next day, a student who wanted to beat me in swimming, invited me to swim is not a race, and at the same pace. At his request, I began to teach him a new technique of the crawl swimming. I also showed another student how to swim on his back. They followed my instructions, and promised me a good master those techniques that I taught them.

III.

Although the Russians say that they have in the country a lot of different religions, where we were, we saw mainly Russian Orthodox Church. Putin, quite openly cooperates with the Patriarchate (here the complete dominance of men), and obviously uses it for political purposes. Russian have different historical experiences, including the non-religious education in the XX century. The driving force that returns the church in Russia, associated with older people who have left their religious beliefs, in spite of communism. But this is a government that uses political means, finance and ideas of radical Christianity to strengthen Orthodoxy.

On top of the hill, a five minute walk from the Houses of humanism, there is a chapel in the woods. It was built recently near the source of spring water, which is now considered the "holy" water. I do not know why. There is also a charming gazebo for relaxing and even a small building,

swimming pool - dark, with benches and a large, square hole at the bottom of the pit is filled with water. He dug in the ground for the immersion of the whole body in the "holy" water. It reminds me of a place for the baptism of adults. There is also a covered area with picnic tables, in the shop you can buy snacks. More above the road to the village of Bogdanovka, there is a small church. On the porch - large scarves for the women to cover their heads before entering inside. Inside the church a woman sells candles and books, something for women's clothing. I did not go deep into the church, while the entrance of the interior looked welcoming. The interior was dark and cool, had a lot of tall, thin, color ivory candles. They burned brightly.

Minibus brings tourists, creating a stream of men, women and children walking up to the «Neupivaemaya Chasha» source ². They carry a large plastic containers to fill their "holy" water from the well and dragged them through the gates that close at night. As previously it was a public place, which has now assumed the church, some are outraged that the passage to the source is now controlled by the servants of the church. Perhaps the church simply confiscated the land? Here is another case which makes me wonder why people think that the church has the moral authority?

In the lecture, I raised the issue of the protest song of the punk band Pussy Riot. Among the audience started a storm of controversy. During the debate, I have long tried to find out the opinion of a conservative student. Three members of the group were arrested and sat in jail awaiting trial because they sang anti-Putin song-prayer in Christ the Savior Cathedral in February, before the elections. She was very upset. She began with the recognition that she is not a believer, but her mother is a believer. She regarded as an act of protest disrespectful and indecent because the Pussy Riot attacked the church and sang at the altar ³. I was surprised. She also said that they were irresponsible because two of them small children, and now women are in prison, instead of taking care of their kids. She does not think that they deserve imprisonment, but some kind of punishment they must suffer.

In Russia, the storm around Pussy Riot went on. Even after I returned home, the trial took place, in which they were convicted, sentenced to two years in prison each. They were charged with disorderly conduct, consisting of inciting religious hatred; Judge Marina Syrova concluded that their feminist performance equivalent to religious hatred.

According to a publication of Vladimir Isachenkova in *The Huffington the Post*, «Pussy Riot case showed tremendous influence of the Russian Orthodox Church. Although church and state are separated officially, it has positioned itself as the heart of Russian national identity. Critics say that the strengthening of the church makes it a quasi-state institution. Some Orthodox groups and many believers are calling for severe punishment [member of the group Pussy Rayet] for the actions that they consider blasphemous. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill made no secret of the fact that he is a loyal defender of Putin, praising his leadership as "God's miracle." He described the performance of the punk band one of the attacks on the church of "hostile forces." The judgment reveals collusion between church and state in Russia. British MP Chris Bryant (Chris Bryant) in his Twitter wrote: "Pussy Riot verdict shows us two pairs of the dead hand: the Russian Orthodox Church and Putin, who are dragging Russia in the last century. ""

On the weekend, all went on the tour. Saturday morning brought me Valery, Norman and two other students in Moscow, where we spent the night from Saturday to Sunday. Others in this weekend went to Kolomna, a small town located near the Houses of humanism. In Kolomna has a railway station. Trains - perfect mode of transport. Unfortunately, I was not able to go to Kolomna and drive train.

In Kuvakin fairly large apartment. Tanya, his sister told me that he knows how to do everything. Indeed he has prepared for us a great dinner, when we returned at night alone after all the sightseeing. Students helped him wash the dishes and clean up the mess.

We travel all over Moscow metro. Trains are big and clean. There are frequent. Even when we did the transplant, it was found that up and down we move on the moving escalator. Each metro station has a unique and special character, some of them really beautiful. Traveling the world, I like to learn the subway. I must say that in Moscow, perhaps, the best metro in the world in many respects. Among the other wonderful sights we visited the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts (it should visit everything), the Kremlin and Red Square, Tretyakov



As a souvenir foreign lecturers received a gift "for three": each of them - Floris, Tony and Norman - was handed a bottle of corporate brand of vodka "Lenin in flood." Who is Lenin, they know what is a spill and "pour on three" he explained.

Gallery, saw the monument to the founder of Moscow (1147) Yuri Dolgoruky. Almost every statue that we see in this country is associated with the war. In Moscow, there are several monuments famous poets and writers. All of them are men. We saw the statue at the entrance of a student at the Moscow State University. Women are poorly represented in the visual culture of the country. In the Tretyakov Gallery, we find very few paintings, written by women, is exhibited in the main work of male artists.

Of course, when it comes to the advertising and sale of goods, the situation is completely the opposite. A woman with huge breasts, blonde, like a farmer's daughter - in the middle of a huge billboard, we often come across on the roadside. Her full breasts falling out of a dress with a low neckline - it is probably the point at which the sale begins. Why do advertisers think that this - unattainable for me the truth of life. I met a young woman with a billboard that faces the audience bare back and gazing at them because of the shoulder. I do not know what is advertised, but like a lot of advertising. It seems that is new to Russia, I think that it is a western-style capitalism. We pass by the McDonald's, Starbucks (coffee house chain - *annotated translation.*), Fast food restaurants Rostik's and Subways in the city and, surprisingly, we find Fridays at Moscow Sheremetyevo International Airport.

I noticed that the athletes and young people in the advertising posters depicted intelligent, pleasant attitudes. It turns out some kind of double-edged sword. Communism declared all equal, and photos of the time demonstrate the equality of people. Patriarchy applies a double standard with regard to women. That shows the church, confusing the citizens of Russia, who, as far as I can tell, very faint idea of progressive values.

Moscow - a sea of many high-rise buildings made of cement, never knew what color - gray apartment buildings erected during the Soviet era. The idea was that everyone should be equal, all have to live in the same houses. Externally, the buildings look alike. But the size of the apartment based on your marital status. The appearance of the building and general communal areas - doorways and elevators - in a terrible state and in dire need of cleaning and repair. But the apartments themselves have all the amenities, large windows and balconies.

On Sunday we spent the day on the old Arbat Street, the most famous street in Moscow. This is one of the oldest streets in the city, the first time it is mentioned in 1493 in connection with a fire that began in the church of St. Nicholas. When I returned home, the site of Moscow-life.com learned that it was originally a suburb, where merchants from the East came with caravans of goods. In the XVIII century Arbat became popular among Moscow intellectuals, writers and artists

who have visited numerous cafes, strolling around the neighborhood and tree-lined boulevards. Pushkin himself lived here with his wife in the house number 53 (the building has since been a museum dedicated to the poet). Tolstoy lived in adjacent to the Arbat Old Arbat. Nearby lived and Maria Hartung - eldest daughter of Pushkin.

Today, Arbat - all the same very lively and breathtaking street. She put up a large number of original works of art, a lot of street musicians; I remember a young man who rolled the piano in the center of the street. He played to the delight of those of us who were in this morning on this sunny street. We were able to enjoy lunch (there are many restaurants and cafes), near - the largest bookstore in Moscow. It was a delightful walk. Anyone who will be in Moscow, be sure to go to the Arbat.

* * *

Another issue - sexual minorities. It emerged at the beginning of our summer school for lunch. Some expressed dissatisfaction, saying that the theme of tolerance towards gays and lesbians already got them. Other nods his head. I do not know who first started talking about it, but I do not think that it was an expression of personal views. In 1993 homosexuality was decriminalized in Russia. In the Soviet Union it was threatened with imprisonment. Nevertheless, many of the homosexual community are semi-underground existence and homophobia is deeply rooted in people's minds. Curiously, some of the participants of the summer school to the last presentation Jupe had no idea that it - gay. One guy has hinted to me that he suspects that Jupe - gay, but did not dare to ask him about it. Another guy said Jupe, that if he openly described himself as gay a year ago, he would have met a poor reception. But he is ready to discuss this subject, because, after all, we are humanists.

His last lecture, on Friday, August 3 Jupe decided to dedicate the topic of sexual minorities. He mainly spoke about his personal experience of life, since childhood. His eyes were wide audience. After the presentation in the debate, one of the students told us that now, after a private conversation with Joop she looks at this issue differently. On her face I could read a contradictory attitude to homosexuality. But it was clear that Jupe by his presence and his presentation gave students a lot of food for thought.

To my surprise, a week later, the pop star Madonna was in favor of gay rights at a concert in St. Petersburg, the hometown of President Vladimir Putin. This city has been passed a law banning homosexual "propaganda". Allegedly, under the pretext of protection of minors it was forbidden to speak publicly about the LGBT community or confirm the identity of its members. The law practically imposed a ban on gay parades and other public events organized by them. From the stage Madonna said, "We want to fight for the right to be free." The human rights of LGBT organization *Coming Out*⁴ issued a public statement in which he said: "As promised, Madonna said deep tronuvshis us it between songs 'Open Your Heart' and 'Masterpiece', in which she praised the democracy, love and freedom and compared the LGBT struggle for their rights with the struggle of Martin Luther King Jr. for equality. She added that gays should be treated with kindness and respect for their dignity, and there is no right to use religion to promote hatred against a particular group of people "

Now the Russian Orthodox Church officials began to lobby for a federal law that would forbid to recognize the rights of sexual minorities. In my opinion, it's a shame when some Russian ignore the meaning of what they sang Pussy Riot and focused on the issue of contempt of religion. People seem to be little aware that religion has supported tyranny against which they themselves and act.

Translation from English - VA Kuvakin

¹ National Public Radio (NPR, National Public Radio) - the largest non-profit organization that collects and then distributes news from 797 US radio stations. Financed by donations audience (businesses and individuals). In 2007, its budget was 172 million dollars, in 2009 -.. 140 million (the budget has decreased in connection with the economic crisis). Of this amount, about one-third - individual donations of ordinary listeners, 10 percent - government support and grants, the rest of - corporate donations. The number of radio listeners for each week is approximately 32 million people (about 10 percent of the US population). According to a survey conducted in 2005, news from NPR listeners most trusted http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Public_Radio

² "The Inexhaustible Cup" - the icon of the Mother of God, originating from Vladychny Vvedensky monastery of Serpukhov. Known since 1878 and is revered in the Russian Church as miraculous. According to popular belief, it is believed that it helps to get rid of alcoholism, drug addiction and smoking (*note. Interpreter*).

³ songs are performed not from the altar and from the pulpit. The pulpit - a place in the Christian church, from which the biblical texts are read, recited litanies and sermons, ie a series of prayers, uttered a long, deacon or priest.. (*Note red..*).

⁴ St. Petersburg LGBT organization "Coming Out" (*note. Interpreter*).