



Don and Eunice Mast together with Sasha Nikitin, "Sing Along", 1990.

This could be mere coincidence or it could have happened because of two songs Mom and I sang while on our visit with Sergei and Tanya Nikitin in Moscow in 1990. In either case both circumstances gave me a warm feeling and something I want to share at the expense of seeming to blow my own horn.

You all know how special that trip was for Mom and me. Yesterday I was viewing a copy of the DVD of our trip and was struck by this phenomenon. The first episode involved our participation with the three Nikitins on Moscow television with more than a dozen Russian children. Mom was leading us all in many songs as was her custom with the aid of her animal props. One song Mom and I sang together was the song "Family". Five years or so later I was watching TV series on the Discovery channel about the experience of two icebreakers in the Arctic Ocean. The American icebreaker was having difficulty navigating through the frozen sea and needed help from the larger and more competent Russian icebreaker which came to the rescue. When the Russian icebreaker finally accomplished the task of freeing its American counterpart they wanted to celebrate. A dozen or so Russian children on board appeared on the ice with banjo and other instruments singing the song "Family". Now they may have learned the song from many sources, but I will always believe we taught them on that television set in 1990.

The other more bizarre incident also involved Mom and I singing a song at the Russian folk festival in Samara on that same trip in 1990. I'm sure we've told you about the special occasion when the Nikitins took us along to the annual Folk Festival and allowed us to sing two songs on that 'guitar' stage in the water while thousands of people sat on the mountain surrounding the

stage. One of the songs was our favorite "One Blue Sky" by Pete Seeger. Now this is a bit of a stretch but I'm making the connection anyway. Two months ago we read the horrifying details of the slaughter of 77 children at a camp outside the city of Oslo, Norway. It seems that Anders Breivik thought "cultural Marxists" infiltrated Norwegian schools and says that Pete Seeger's song "One Blue Sky" brainwashed children into supporting immigration. To celebrate the incident at the trial thousands of Norwegian people led by their folksinger Lillebjoern Nilsen sang the song as they gathered outside surrounding the courthouse. They added the words "a sky full of stars, blue sea as far as you can see, An earth where flowers grow, can you wish for more; Together shall we live, every sister and brother, Young children of the rainbow, and a fertile land."

Both episodes reinforces the fact that music is a powerful tool in communicating a message which cannot be done in any other way.

So thank you again my dear friends, Sergei-Tanya-Sasha for coming into my life and the memories of Eunice which are revived again and again.

Don

Tatiana and Sergey Nikitin's Reply



The last "Sing Along" concert at the Mast House, 2010

Dear Don,

we were very touched and even overwhelmed by your letter. We wanted to think it over in light of what transpired to us over the years. The simple truth that happiness is when all of your loved ones are alive and well and with you has proved itself once again over the years in a bitter and certain way.

As it happened, our first encounter with you and the rest of the American group on the Maxim Gorky steam boat became a turning point in our lives. At the time, we hoped for the best and looked at the world with optimism. We believed that good is more powerful than evil and that much depended upon us. Meeting all of you, but especially Eunice and you, gave ground to such hopes. Our friendship, mutual trust and sympathy started from the moment we met and not once did we ever doubt that we were so miraculously lucky. Through you, we got to meet the best people your country had to offer -- honest, warmhearted, kind and open to friendship. They were not politicians -- they were regular US citizens who form the invisible, but so important fabric of society, the people, if you like.

Our visits to your home, our travels around the country by car -- that Bill Shaw helped organize -- remain a happy time in our memory.

Of course, we also did our best so that you had an exciting and memorable time in Russia. I remember how one time, after visiting the cathedrals of Vladimir Eunice expressed regret that not all of your friends, if invited to Russia, would be able to deal with the quirks of local amenities. Thank you for finding ease and comfort in our small apartment which at the time we also shared with Sergey's mother; thank you for welcoming our friends; for performing at different venues; for neglecting the modest surroundings of our lives and instead recognizing how wonderful our friends were. We remember how Eunice called Zyama Gerdt 'Taj Mahal'; how we celebrated Christmas and New Year's at your house, together with the Hackmans, in advance! -- with all the games and presents. There was so much laughter, so many jokes!

We also learned a great lesson in Eunice's courageous departure. One must be such a genuinely good person, to be able to illuminate the lives of loved ones until the very last moment!

Thank you Don, and others that surrounded you for taking care of Sasha, thank you for the happiness of coinciding with us in time and crossing paths with us on the Volga river! It feels like

it was no accident. Please, live long and prosperously, because through you our American journey continues.

Yours,
the Nikitins