

Alan – Tried to Commit Suicide.  
Pat – Alan’s Friend that he brought to Russia. Speaks no Russian.  
Sarah – Pat’s Daughter. Has Cerebral Palsy and is Deaf.  
Eric – Peace Corps Volunteer in Uglich.  
Phil – Peace Corps Volunteer in Uglich.  
Olga – A 20 Year Old Russian Girl that Speaks English  
Kolya – Translator for American Organization, Miramed  
Anna – An English Teacher, Friend, and Phil’ Counterpart; Frequently Used as a Translator  
Galena Safarovna – The director of the Uglich orphanage  
Marilyn – Peace Corps Doctor  
Katya – The orphan that Pat was sponsoring as part of Alan’s program  
Vaseely – My Russian tutor  
Sasha – Vaseely’s Son

### Just Trust Me

-by Eric Schempp

Maslanitsa is a pretty fun holiday. It celebrates the coming of spring. This is despite the fact that the holiday is at the end of February when the temperature hovers around 0 degrees Celsius and the sun still sets at 4:00 PM. There is a lot of drinking involved, but there is more to the holiday than that. Those who want to can elect to crawl up to the top of a greased 10-meter high pole and try to get a chicken. For some reason, the fewer clothes you have on the easier it is. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that the skin on your body gets stuck to the pole and gives you that much more friction. There is glory in the end, however. The first person to the top of the pole gets the chicken that sitting up there. I must confess that I tried to get the chicken (with my clothes on), but failed miserably.

I remembering thinking, “I have lived in Russia for a year, constantly defending the country to stupid, arrogant Americans. But now, I must confess, my American friends are right. Russians are crazy.”

The next day I changed my mind.

### Day 1 – Monday Feb. 26th

*“Russians have friends. Americans have Psychiatrists.”  
-A well known Russian saying*

I got up just before noon. “That’s not too bad,” I thought. “The day after Maslanita and I still manage to get up a with a few hours of sunlight left.” I was actually quite proud of myself. Furthermore, I didn’t have too much of a hangover. Things were getting better and better. I opened the fridge, made some toast, took a shower and flipped on my computer to check e-mail. I had just come back from a trip to Germany and had over 2 weeks of e-mails to read.

The phone rang. It was Phil.

“Are you ready for an interesting day?” he asked.

“Not really,” I said.

“Tough,” He said “Alan has taken some pills and is passed out. He has a friend with him named Pat that doesn’t speak a word of Russian and she is flipping out. She also brought her daughter who is deaf and has cerebral palsy with her. Will you go over, take a look at him, and if necessary call the ambulance?”

“Oh wow!” I thought, “Peace Corps – The toughest job you will ever love.”

Alan. He is this crazy American in Uglich about 30 years of age. He had some trouble last summer. He attempted suicide three times and infuriated the whole town. One time, people didn't have any idea where he was. They called his house many times and nobody answered. When they went his door, there was no answer. They scoured the streets late at night and found nothing. After a few days of doing this they got really scared and had the police let them into his house. There he was, lying on the ground passed out. He had taken too many pills.

I agreed to run over to look at Alan. Phil agreed to show up as soon as he could. He lived on the other side of town and the transportation situation in Uglich is not the best. I shut down my computer, put pants and deodorant on and ran out the door. I stopped to pick up some juice and fruits for Alan's paAlanly little friend and continued on my way to his apartment.

I knew where Alan lived because once last fall I had been there. When I met Alan he had graduated orphans living with him. That was his thing: helping orphans. That's why I knew him too. He and I both worked in the same orphanage. I was there as a Peace Corps Volunteer. He was there as something else.

Three years earlier Alan came as a volunteer with an organization called Miramed to work at the Uglich Orphanage for a summer. When the summer finished, Alan asked if he could come back the following year. Miramed said no. So, he decided to come back on his own. He had been doing that for two consecutive summers and this was to be his third.

Alan had set up a program to help the orphanage. In all fairness to Alan I must say that it was an impressive program benefiting a lot of orphans. It was called the Russian Orphan Sponsorship Program and was designed to match Americans with orphans. Alan would go home for winters. He would spend three months in the states saving money and then come to Russia and spend it. He didn't make much in the states. But, three months work in the states gave him enough money to survive in Russia for nine months. While in America, Alan would recruit sponsors. The people would send \$20 or so every month. Every Sunday (and Sunday, because the market in Uglich is only open on Sunday) Alan would take kids to the local market in Uglich to buy clothing, school supplies and many other things. Each sponsor had one or two specific orphans. A detailed account of how the money was spent was always kept and reported to the sponsor. In return, the kids were responsible for sending letters to their sponsor in America. In all honesty, it was a very good program.

I didn't know what to make of Alan when I met him. He was always trying to explain to me how Russia operated despite that fact that I had lived in this country a year. He was also an obvious conspiracy theorist. That didn't bother me too much. I figure there are a lot of normal conspiracy theorists functioning fine in life, and if they want to think someone is out to get them, that's their choice. They have every right to do so. After all, they could be right. I might be the ignorant one. Whatever the case, I figure life is easier if I don't worry about things like that. Alan's conspiracy theories were a bit far fetched, but it didn't bother me too much.

What really bothered me was the fact that he was a close talker. One time while he was talking to me, he got me pinned in a corner and I had to suffer as hot, steamy, conspiracy theorist breath went flying into my face. I had no more room to back up and couldn't get away left or right. I had to stand there saying, "Yes, Alan. You are right Alan," even though I had no idea what he was saying. I was concentrating too hard on how I was going to make my escape. Eventually, a friend came up and distracted him, and I was able to slip away.

I took the Juice and Fruit that I had bought and ran up to Alan's apartment. He lived on the top level; the fifth. Because there was only five levels, Russian law didn't make an elevator mandatory. Thus, I went up five flights of stairs. And I hurried up them too.

When I got to the top I was a bit tired. I rang the doorbell. "Who's there?" came a woman's voice. It was Alan's friend, Pat.

Pat. Phil told me a bit about her on the phone. He had met Pat and her daughter Sarah, a very sweet little girl, earlier at Alan's place. She had come to Russia with Alan to see an orphan that she was sponsoring as part of Alan's program. All four of them went to the market to buy a few things for a little orphan girl. Before they split Pat took down Phil's phone number in case there was a problem of any sort. It's a good thing she did. The next day he attempted suicide.

"It's Me, Eric," I answered. The trouble is, I forgot that Phil had told me that she didn't speak any Russian. When I answered, "It's Me, Eric," I said it in Russian. But it shouldn't have been to big of a deal since the word "the" doesn't exist in Russian and my name doesn't change that much. None-the-less she didn't like it.

"How am I supposed to know it's you. You need to speak English!" she said.  
"Oh, I am sorry," I said.

I thought the next words out of my mouth were going to be, "Nice to meet you too." Instead, it was "Sorry."

Four months earlier, just as Phil was arriving in Uglich and Alan was leaving for the winter, they briefly met. They learned what is an incredibly huge coincidence: they are both from the same small area in California. Alan was in Grass Valley and Phil was from Auburn (about 25 miles apart), and both would live halfway across the world in yet another very small but famous town, Uglich.

When Phil learned that Alan was arriving soon after his "hibernation" in the states, he contacted Alan and asked him to run over to his parents' house and pick up a few things and bring them with him. That's why Phil went to Alan's house. That's why Phil met Pat. That's why Pat called Phil when trouble occurred. It was relayed to me, and that's why I was standing at Alan's door.

I went in and asked where Alan was. She pointed. I stepped around a cute little confused girl and went into the next room. There he was. He laid face down with his head turned to the right. His body was covered by a blanket that was covered in puke. He was essentially blocking the doorway of the room and to get in I had to step over him. I tapped him on the shoulder many times and got no response. I lifted the puke-covered blanket and checked his pulse and it was strong and regular. I decided to call the ambulance.

I told Pat my plan. She didn't like it. "You know," she said "he's done this before, and he may wake up in a few hours. If he wakes up in a hospital he will be mad at me. He has woken up in hospitals before and been mad at me before for taking him to the hospital. I don't want that."

I didn't really listen to what she said. I wanted to. I really did. I wanted to comprehend what she was saying. She just talked too slowly. Incredibly slowly. By the time she finished a sentence I forgot what she was saying.

I asked how long he had been passed out. She said since 9 AM. It was now 2 PM. I guessed that that wasn't too bad. But, I didn't like the fact that he had been puking. The fact that he had been rolling in it didn't make the sight that much easier to bear either.

"What did he take," I asked. "He took Welbutrin," she said. "It's an Anti-depressant drug. I know. I take it. The pills he took are pills that he must have stolen from me, because the bottle has my name on it." She showed me the bottle. "How many did he take?" I asked. "The bottle is empty and I don't know how many there were to begin with," she said. There were a few pills on the floor and she told me he gets kind of sloppy when he takes pills.

It was then that I decided might be a good opportunity to introduce myself. I formally met Pat. She was a somewhat short and stout woman. The girl with her was indeed Sarah. Pat told me that Sarah had cerebral palsy and was deaf. She was about 12 years old but had the mental capability of a child. We turned back to Alan.

In a peculiar sort of way, it was all kind of funny. On Saturday Alan introduced Pat to Russia. On Sunday he introduced her to Phil. On Monday, I introduced myself and said “hi” to Alan for the first time in 5 months as he was passed out on the floor.

I went to the phone to try to call the ambulance.

“It’s pointless,” said Pat. “It’s dead.” He ripped the phone cord out last night when he went on a temper tantrum. He had a real attitude last night.”

“Geez” I thought. “Russia is not that bad. Anyone can tolerate it for at least a week before they are driven to suicide”

I went out into the hallway in my socks and knocked on Alan’s neighbor’s door. Someone was there but didn’t want to answer. I knocked on another neighbor’s door. An older woman and grown son answered the door. I explained that I needed to call the ambulance and they didn’t appear to be too shocked. The son brought me in, put a stool in front of me, brought me the phone, gave me the number to the ambulance, and went about his business in the house. I called the ambulance and they agreed to show up. I thanked the family for letting me use their phone and left.

I still couldn’t get over the fact that after being in the country for only two days, Alan decided to attempt suicide. “But hey, I thought, if your going to do it, at least you were smart about it. You used pills and you did it in a country with socialized medicine. I guess I gotta hand it to you, not a bad choice. You picked a great place to cry for help.” I thought that I would at least see Alan alive once before he did anything too crazy. I guess I was wrong.

I went back into Alan’s apartment to tell Pat that the ambulance would be there soon. Phil arrived and I told him everything that had developed.

We knew that with everything going on, we were going to need a translator. We recommended our friend Kolya. He is a professional translator and translates for Miramed. He is by far the best English speaker in the city of Uglich. I used him as a translator on almost a daily basis to get the really important things communicated to the orphanage.

“No,” Pat said, “I will not use anyone that works for that horrible organization Miramed.”

“Why Pat?”

“Because they screwed my friend over,” She said.

“Miramed is a legitimate organization trying to help orphans.”

“I don’t care.”

“But Kolya speaks English better than anyone in this city,” Phil said, “And besides you are dealing with life and death.”

“I don’t care. I will not use any translator who works with Miramed, nor do I want anyone associated with the orphanage. I don’t want people to know that we are taking Alan to the hospital.”

“Tough” said Phil, “They already know.”

Pat whined about conspiracy theories that Alan had engraved in her head. Theories about how the director of the orphanage is the number one nemesis. Pat said that she would not allow any person like that to be involved in saving his life.

“Fine” we said. “We’ll call another friend, Anna.”

We inquired further about the temper tantrum that Alan had had the night before.

The previous day, Alan, Pat, and Sarah went to the orphanage. They took Olga with them, a young girl of 20 years of age. She was a student at the Pedagogical Institute in Uglich and spoke English fairly well. She had come to our English club on a regular basis and it was there that Phil met her. She and Phil began dating periodically.

Alan, Pat, and Sarah had gone to the orphanage to talk to Galena Safarovna. Olga was to act as a translator. Alan's Russian was at a novice-high level, which is enough to communicate, but only on a very basic level. That's the reason they took Olga with them.

Alan and Galena Safarovna have always hated each other. Last year when Alan wound up in the hospital Galena Safarovna went to visit him and he threw a chair at her. She has hated him ever since. She always wanted to kick him out of the orphanage, but she really couldn't afford to do so. He brought a lot of money into the orphanage.

Alan simply wanted to introduce Pat and Sarah to Galena Safarovna, and that was it. He wanted to go ask someone else for permission about taking the orphan Pat was sponsoring to St. Petersburg. But, feeling it was probably best to get the director's permission, Pat asked Olga decided to ask permission without Alan's presence. They did and Galena Safarovna did not approve.

They went home and told Alan what had happened. He was furious. He screamed and hollered, mostly at Olga. This was because she was the one who asked questions to Galena Safarovna that she shouldn't have. For that that reason, Alan was irate. He ripped the phone cord out and threw a can of hair spray through a window. The window had two panes, and only the first was broken.

It started to become late and Olga needed to get back to her hometown; Ribinsk. They did some research and found a car to take her home.

The next morning at 9 AM, Pat found Alan crawling around on his hands and knees puking his guts out. Eventually he lost consciousness and passed out.

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The ambulance arrived and the medic came up to Alan's apartment with a military stretcher. He was dressed in normal civilian clothes. The stretcher he had with him was one of those where it can't bend in the middle. To get it in the door he had to lift it vertically. I just stood there silently and wondered, "is he going to ask us to put Alan on that. There is no possible way that it can be done."

The medic gave Alan some smelling salts. There was no reaction. He wanted to see the bottle of pills, but that meant nothing to him. He asked to see Alan's identification and after a small search we found his wallet. He then announced that we were going to have to load him on the stretcher he brought up. We protested. There would be no way to get him through the door. The medic was stumped. He didn't know what to do. He really didn't. Then he got a bright idea. We would load him on the puke-covered blanket and take him down to the ambulance.

We went to lay the blanket out carefully dodging the puke spots. We loaded Alan. Phil took a corner by his head. The medic took the corner just opposite. I took the feet. Sarah just watched and curiously moaned. She didn't have a clue what was happening.

I thought the original idea was that we would put Alan on the blanket, take him out of the apartment, transfer him to the stretcher, and take him down the stairs on the stretcher but I was wrong. When we got out the door, the stretcher was gone.

We picked up Alan and he was dead weight. They don't joke around when they say dead weight is heavy. This guy was as dead as dead could be and indeed, he was heavy. We maneuvered him through the front door and to the top of the steps before we had to take a break.

"Did you think this was in your Peace Corps job description," Phil asked.  
"Not at all," I said.

Eventually we got up the courage to continue. I walked backwards with the feet and Phil and the medic walked forward. That way if Alan slipped out the blanket his head wouldn't immediately crack open. Then again, it wouldn't matter. He had other complications going on inside his body that were more important.

One of my most vivid memories occurred while we were taking him down the steps. Every time we reached the bottom of a flight of steps and had to make what was essentially a u-turn to head to the next flight, Alan's head would very casually flip to his other shoulder. It was very eerie. It was as if his head was on a hinge and there were no muscles in his neck. His head just flopped here and there. Furthermore, it was as if he was watching where he was going. His head faced in the direction of the center of the stairwell.

We banged are way to the bottom, and Alan bounced along looking as though he was enjoying the ride. I am sure some pretty big bruises resulted from that trip down that stairwell, but from the look on his face, he didn't seem to mind. I guess, the more times you do it, the easier it gets.

Phil and I looked at the ambulance and laughed. It was rusty van with benches on the sides. Pat looked scared. We got in and went on our merry way. Pat kept on talking about how she needed to come up with a story on how he got the pills. She was afraid she would get into trouble.

"Don't worry," we said.

"But, the medics will think that I gave him the pills," she said.

"Did you?"

"No."

"Then don't worry."

We eventually got to the hospital. I whipped out my camera and Phil snapped a picture for good measure, and then we wheeled him in. The first thing the doctor said was, "We know this guy. He was here last year."

"Well, well, what do you make of that," I thought.

Alan was brought into a small room with concrete walls; walls were cracking. There was nothing else inside. That was it. Alan's puke covered shirt was removed. I was then ordered to put his body on its side while the doctor's went about doing things out in the corridor. I didn't understand the logic of holding Alan's body on its side. I knew that it probably had something to do with the fact that they didn't want him to choke should he puke again, but I didn't think it mattered too much since he had just spent the previous six hours on his stomach. But they were the doctors, they gave the orders, and I listened.

Eventually the police came and we had to give a report. The officer asked questions; we answered them. He wanted my details and nobody else's. That was strange, but I obliged and gave them to him. The officer wanted to know everything. He must have given a million reports in his day, because he was good at what he was doing. For Pat's sake, we didn't mention where the pills had come from. All in all, it was a glory moment for Phil and me. We gave an entire police report in Russian. We figured that if we could successfully do that in Russian, then we could do anything in Russian.

They moved Alan down to what was supposedly the intensive care unit. We weren't allowed to go in. We sat there waiting and staring at the door. We eventually dubbed this room, "The forbidden room." Pat was constantly complained about the place.

"She had no idea where she was coming, did she?" Phil said.

"Nope."

Granted it was dirty, smelly, paint was cracking, and the equipment they were using was thirty years old, but what did she expect?

We called our friend Anna to translate and she eventually arrived in a panic. She helped get everything straightened out. Alan was in the intensive care unit (which simply happened to be the room at the end of the hall) and no, we couldn't go in.

"But, given time," Anna said, "you'll see him."

We waited, got some food at the in hospital grocery store, and waited some more.

I told Pat that we took a picture of Alan. "That's a good idea," Pat said, "I did the same thing with my daughter when she wound up in hospital as a result of her own actions once."

I wanted to inquire further, but decided against it. I was really starting to think strange things of Pat. Eventually we were told that we could go in but only one at a time and for no more than 5 minutes. We agreed. I went in and looked. There sat Alan in a bed. There was no oxygen and no other nearby equipment. He did have an IV in him, which was a good sign, but other than that there was nothing to be too terribly proud of.

Pat, with her hands shaking violently, told us that all she could think about was going and drinking a nice bottle of wine. We didn't think much of it at the time, but it proved to be the first trademark of Pat. Drinking wine. But simply drinking wine wasn't enough. It had to be a dry, white, wine. Nothing else would do. Just good old dry, white, whine. I think I have avoided it since.

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Eventually it came time to leave the hospital. Phil put Alan's puke covered clothes under his arm.

Sarah did not want to leave. She cried and moaned and put up a fuss. But, we had to go. The taxi we had ordered as waiting.

We hurried out to meet the taxi before it took off. We were going to Phil's apartment. It would have been a ten-minute walk, but we had to take a taxi. Pat insisted. This turned out to be the second trademark of Pat. She would not go anywhere by foot. All traveling had to be done by taxi. "Is that an American characteristic," I thought, "or is it just Pat?"

We went to Phil's and sat down to relax, think, and eat. Phil threw Alan's puke covered clothes in his closet.

We knew that we had phone calls to make but first we had to gather our thoughts and piece together the days events. While we were talking, Pat told us that when Alan takes pills he usually wakes up the next day. That was comforting, but led to more questions.

"How many times has he done this," we asked.  
"About twelve."

On that note, Phil ran to the store to pick up the specially requested dry, white, whine for Pat. When he came back, Pat gave Alan's parents' phone number to him. She refused to call them herself. I didn't know what she was afraid of. Phil sat down, relaxed, thought about what he was going to say, and dialed. Alan's mother answered. She wasn't too terribly shocked. She said that his father was at work and that she would try to get hold of him and get his advice. Phil agreed to call back.

I called Olga, to see if she made it home safely. She did make it home, but wasn't there when I called. I had to talk to her mom. I told her mom that Alan was in the hospital. She said she would relay the message to Olga.

The next thing to do was obvious. We needed advice. And when you need advice, there is only one place call. Phil picked up the phone and called God.

God is a woman. Everyone knows that they can turn to God if they are in need of help. She will always lend an ear. God cares about all. And of course, God is good and great and everything in between.

God is none other than Marilyn, the doctor for Peace Corps Western Russia. Phil explained the situation to her and listened to her advice. She told us to hang tight for the night.

“If he doesn’t wake up in the morning,” she said, “have him shipped to Moscow.”

She explained that had it been one of us laying there unconscious, she would be in Uglich within a few hours, and see to it that we were airlifted out of there immediately. She said that we would be in America within 24 hours.

“Ahh,” we thought, “how comforting to power of God is.”

Twenty minutes later Phil called Alan’s parents again and talked to Alan’s father, Lee. He was very relaxed. He said he appreciated the call as well as our efforts. He was generally very nice. He said that he was very nervous that Pat went with him to Russia.

“Something like this always happens when she is around,” he said, “And it is very strange that every time he attempts, she somehow plays a role in it.”

“How many times has Alan done this?” Phil asked.

“About 12,” was the answer.

Phil told him that if this had been one of us, our Peace Corps Doctor would have us in America the next day. And since the hospital in Uglich was well below standard, Phil recommended taking him to Moscow.

“Do what you think is best,” Alan’s father said, “but he has done this many times before. You are going to have to use his money and do it within his budget. He has no insurance.”

“No insurance at all?” Phil asked.

“No, and we cannot afford to lose our house over this. He has done this too many times before. If he goes, he goes.”

Phil hung up and relayed what was said to me.

“Wow!” I said “That’s a heavy burden.”

So, now all we knew was that we had a crazy American 75% dead, and it was up to us to “do our best.” What did that mean? Do your best? We would try.

We called the hospital.

“He’s in a Coma,” they said

“A coma?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.” We were all too exhausted to express any emotion at this point. I remember casually thinking,

“Coma, that’s the next step before death.”

We sat around and drank the dry white wine (spelled “whine” from this point forth) that Pat really, really wanted. We talked about Alan, his problems, and what our next step was. We decided that the only thing we could do was wait. We concluded that he would probably wake up in the morning. If he didn’t, we would go from there.

Pat complained about the lack of sunlight. The sun set at 4:00 PM and probably wouldn’t rise the next morning until about 8:30 AM. She really was not used to Russia.



“This crazy,” I thought, “It’s a good thing Phil gave his phone number to Pat. If not, Alan would probably have died, and Pat would have been left stranded without knowing a word of Russian. She would not have survived.”

Before we knew it, the dry white wine was gone. We decided to go home and get some sleep. We called yet another taxi and I rode with Pat and Sarah to Alan’s apartment, dropped her off, and then went home and went to bed.

## Day 2 – Tuesday Feb. 27th

The phone rang. It was 10:30 in the morning. I knew who was going to be on the other end.

“Are you ready for day two?” Phil asked.

“He didn’t wake up did he,” I said. It was more a statement than a question.

Phil had already called the parents and told that he did not wake up. Their response was more of the same. “Do what you think is best.” Furthermore, they asked to communicate by e-mail. They weren’t too worried. He had done this enough times for them to be too terribly worried. Besides, e-mail is a lot more cost effective.

Around noon I walked over to Alan’s apartment and informed Pat and Sarah that Alan did not wake up. Pat was a wreck. Her hands were shaking violently. She talked slower than she did the day before and I really had to concentrate hard to listen to what she was saying to understand anything. It was strange. I wanted to say repeatedly, “Just spit it out. What do you want to say!!”

Sarah walked back and forth. I don’t think she comprehended what was going on. But, whatever the case, she was nervous. Poor girl.

We called another taxi to take us to the hospital. Pat had gathered up a few bits of clothes and some slippers. We carefully loaded Sarah in like always and we were on our way to the hospital. Every time we passed a church Sarah would groan and point.

“Sarah loves churches,” Pat said in a very, very slow and broken voice.

“What a sweet girl Sarah is,” I thought.

We got to the hospital and went in. Meanwhile, Phil and Anna were tied up at work. Pat and I asked to see Alan and were told to wait. We waited. Then we waited more.

After a while Pat flipped out. “What the hell is wrong with these people. What the hell is wrong this hospital. This country is fucking ridiculous!” she said.

“Whoa there, Pat! Settle down. Settle down.”

“I can’t believe this. I don’t know what I am doing here! Why can’t this place be civilized? What a shitty country.”

“Easy Pat. Easy,” I said and followed it with, “It will be all right Sarah. Don’t worry.”

Phil and Anna showed up. They informed us Phil was going to have to go to the police and give details of himself since he didn’t do it the day before.

“But, first before anything happens,” Pat said “I want to make sure Alan is going to be better taken care of.”

“Well, that’s easy,” we said, “We’ll just give them a little money and grease the wheels. No sweat.”

Once again Pat flipped. But this time she was generally scared. It was as if she had encountered the grim reaper. She said under her breath with her body shaking, “What’s wrong with this country? It’s corrupt,

it's disgusting, and hospital's don't have any equipment." My response went something along the line of "What did you think you were getting into? Do you think you sponsor orphans in the land of paradise?"

We were constantly saying things to Pat like, "Russia is a great country. Things happen a little differently here. You have to accept that. You have to work with the system, and not against it. You have to quit comparing to your secluded ignorant little world in America to Russia. Then maybe you will open your eyes. Then maybe you will see why it is such a great place."

She didn't listen nor would she ever understand.

All she said was, "so we are going to bribe?"

"Yes," we said.

Pat looked like death. "Will is work?"

"Yes is will work," we said. "Doctors don't make much money in this country. It is socialized medicine. They don't get paid by individuals. Why do you think Alan is here for free? Doctors get paid by the state. And the state does not pay them enough to buy bread. They are doctors not for the money, but rather because they want to help people. They want to help Alan. Now, if they are helping Alan out of the kindness of their hearts, won't you at least help to feed their families?"

She was silent. She didn't understand.

Phil ran out of the hospital to the nearest store. A couple minutes later, he came back with a bottle of Vodka.

"You are going to bribe with Vodka?" Pat asked completely and utterly confused

"No" we said, "We are going to bribe with money. Just look at this bottle of vodka as a gift."

"Oh, boy. I don't like this idea"

"Don't worry, Pat" We were really starting to get annoyed with her. "We don't claim to know this system inside out, but we know it a lot better than you. So please, just let us do our thing!"

Before we had a chance to finish explaining things to Pat the doctor came out and told us that she would talk to us in a minute. She ran down the hall.

I told Pat to quickly stuff money into Alan's slippers that she had brought for him. She pulled out about 1200 rubles and put them in there. "Oh, boy" I thought "That's a lot. That's a month salary for a couple of doctors." To Pat, it was only \$40. I tried to tell her it might be a bit much. I started to, when the nurse came back.

I handed her Alan's slippers and told her they for him when he woke up. She smiled probably thinking, "if he wakes up at all."

"Also," I said. "There is a little something in there for you." She tried to refuse the slippers. I pushed them into her hands. She took them. I tried to give her the plastic bag with Vodka in it, but she would not take it regardless of what I said. She turned around and walked into the forbidden room.

Pat glared at me and said, "No amount of money is too much for me to save my friend's life."

"You don't understand," We told her.

"What don't I understand. That my friend is dying."

"You don't understand that regardless of the situation, you need to be sensitive to the culture you are in."

"What do you mean?"

"You know the doctors work 24 hour shifts. They are there regardless of whether Alan is there or not. You just paid 2-3 weeks salary to them."

"Good."

"It's not good."

"Why?"

“Look Pat. You are the reason people hate America. You are the definition of an Ugly American. You come in here criticizing the place, throwing your money around, thinking you can get whatever you want. In all reality you are likely to offend them and get nothing.”

“I am going to get whatever I want,” she said. That was the end of that.

The nurse came out, thanked us for the money, and told us that we gave her way too much money, but that the money would be spread over the entire staff. Again, she refused the vodka and went back inside.

Phil and Anna left to go talk to the police. My work was with orphanage and they understood that if I wasn't there, I had a good reason. By now, I am sure they knew Alan was in the hospital and that I was trying to take care of him. Word travels fast in Uglich.

Twenty minutes later the doctor came out and said, “you can go in. But it has to be one at a time and only for five minutes.” “Whatever,” we said, “At least we'll see Alan.”

I went in first. I had the bag with Vodka in it. I wasn't supposed to bring anything in the room, but when I told them it was theirs they allowed me to bring it in. I set it by the door and went to look at Alan. He was in a different room all by himself which was good. I tried to talk, yell, and scream, but I got absolutely no response.

Pat and Sarah went in together. The nurses didn't want two to go in. They tried to stop it. But, they came to their senses. I don't know how they were planning on controlling a young deaf girl with cerebral palsy. Pat and Sarah also got no response from Alan.

We left. We went to a local Internet Café and sat and killed time. After a while it was time to meet Phil and Anna at a local restaurant that we agreed on earlier.

I ran into the orphanage and got the girl that Pat was sponsoring. Her name is Katya.

It was here at the restaurant that Pat further annoyed me. She wanted to drop more and more money on Katya. She would ask Katya what she wanted and of course Katya would tell her. She wanted a boom box, clothes, make-up, everything. This was all regardless of the fact the girl didn't have necessities. She had one pair of underwear, one pair of worn out shoes, a couple pairs of socks, and one toothbrush. I tried to explain that Katya did not need an expensive boom box or make-up. She needed necessities. Furthermore, for her to be the only one in the orphanage with a boom box or other eccentricities would create serious jealousy problems. That is something the orphanage could not afford to have. Promising extravagant things like a boom box would not only hurt her, but other children as well.

I was ignored.

I switched subjects.

“How was the meeting with the police,” I asked Phil

“Fine. It wasn't a big deal. They just asked me the same questions that you were asked yesterday.”

“Oh.”

“And tomorrow at 3:00 PM they want to talk to Pat.”

“What?” Pat said.

“You gotta go see them,” Phil said.

“What do I say?”

“Anything you want.”

“I don't want to talk to the police.”

“You have to.”

“I don't know what to tell them.”

“The truth.”

After dinner, we said goodbye to Katya, and Anna, Phil, Pat, and I went to the hospital to check up on Alan, yet again. When we got there, we told the taxi we had ordered to come back in twenty minutes and

walked into the building. Visitor hours had finished at 7:00. It was well past 8:00. We weren't stopped by any of the nurses. We walked right up to the forbidden room, and rang the doorbell. We were let in and saw Alan for about 10 minutes. The bribe had worked.

The doctors told us that things looked okay. He was stable. He did have a temperature, but that was good. It meant his body was starting to respond. It was trying to fight something off. Phil and I left and gave Pat and Sarah a few more minutes with Alan.

"When Sarah touched Alan," Pat said when they came out, "he started moaning and groaning."

"Wow!" I said, "you got a response."

"Sarah not only got a response, she got more," Pat said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," she said, "Alan opened his mouth and let out a quiet whimpering little 'fuck.'"

"Fuck?"

"That's what he said."

"Wow!" I thought, "I hope he pulls through. He must. Famous last words are supposed to be more eloquent than that."

The nurse told us that her shift was to end at 7:00 the next morning. We told her that we wanted to talk to her before she left her shift. "Fine," she said, but you have to be here at 5:45 in the morning if you want to see him." We agreed.

We went back to Phil' and drank dry white wine. Pat had to have it.

We talked about what to do if he didn't wake up. We had to get him to Moscow. We really didn't have a choice. He couldn't stay there at that hospital. He would die. God had told us.

We decided to call God again. "You should have done something today. And now, if he doesn't wake up in the morning, you don't have a choice, you must take him to Moscow." She gave us many different phone numbers to call and lots of contacts. "But," she said, "the best of the best is European Medical Center. Just call them and have them do everything."

Phil called the parents to let them know the situation.

"It's the second day and he didn't wake up," he said, "but there were some positive signs. Sarah was able to get a response out of him. We think he will wake up. But, if he doesn't, we have to take him to Moscow. We keep hearing that over and over. Moscow is the best place for medical emergencies in this country. He must go."

"Okay," was the response, "Do what you think is best."

"We'll need to pay for an ambulance if it comes to that."

"Okay. How can we do this?" Phil' father asked.

"We have his ATM card, but we are going to need his PIN number," Phil said, "Can you give it to us?"

"We'll try to find it."

We hung up.

Pat, Phil, and I talked some more and inquired further about Alan. Pat explained that he had slumps. He would do really well and then eventually he would slip.

"That's too bad," I said.

"What's too bad," she said, "is that he is not being taken better care of. I know Alan. I know what he needs. I know all about hospitals. I have been in and out of them and I know that this place is not good for him. I know these kinds of things. Whenever anyone has a medical problem of some sort, they first come to me because I know that is best"

Phil and I didn't say a word in response. We merely looked at each other and rolled our eyes.

Pat, Sarah, and I took a taxi home. Uglich only had two taxis. By this point in time, we were well known. We didn't even have to give the driver directions. I simply said, "home," and he took us there.

When we got Pat's I told the Taxi driver to wait. I went through the usual ritual of carrying a bag or two and helping Sarah up the stairs to the top floor apartment. When we got there, Pat said she was scared to stay in her apartment alone with Sarah. I offered my place. She thought about it and declined. I insisted. She refused.

I told her that in the morning I would make the ten-minute walk to her house. I would have the taxi meet us at the bottom of her apartment building at 5:30 AM. I hopped back in the taxi and went home.

It was late. It was nearing midnight. I needed to go to bed. I was tired and had to get up early. "Man," I thought, "Pat would be dead if there weren't any American's in this city. She doesn't speak a word of Russian. She has not idea what is going on half the time. She can't go to the store and buy food or water without us. She doesn't know how to get to the orphanage because she refuses to walk. She's scared in her apartment alone with Sarah. She doesn't understand the system. She is stuck in her American ways. She would die without help. What a jerk Alan is to do this to someone he calls a friend. For being such a selfless person, he is pretty damn selfish."

I was seriously behind in personal work that I needed to do. But, I fell asleep relaxed. For some reason, I was sure that Alan would wake up during the night. Then it would all be over. I could get back to my normal life. If he didn't wake, then we had a problem. But, I didn't think it would progress that far. I set my alarm for 5:00 AM and went to bed.

### Day 3 – Wednesday Feb 28<sup>th</sup>

My alarm went off at 5:00. I was out the door by 5:10 and made my way to Pat's. It was cold outside in the early morning chill. Winters in Russia are relentless. It is cold, snowy, and the sun rises at 9 AM. It sets at about 3:30. Winters are not easy.

I got to Pat's at 5:20. She was awake and ready to go. At 5:30 we were down at the bottom of the apartment building and the Taxi was waiting for us. We took it to the hospital.

When we arrived we went straight to the forbidden room to talk to the nurse. We rang the doorbell and out she came. "Alan did not wake up," she said. We went into to see him and got the same old story. "He is doing fine but he still has a temperature."

We wanted to bribe the group of doctors that were going to come on for the next 24-hour shift. They adamantly refused. They told us that the money we already gave them was more than enough to cover both shifts of doctors. So, there was no second bribe. That turned out to be a mistake.

We got a taxi and went to Phil'. Pat could use the Internet there. But, when we banged, there was no response.

We decided to knock on neighbors' doors. The first did not have a phone, but we were referred to someone else. We tried again. This time a lady, came to the door, but didn't open it. Through the door, I asked to use the telephone. She told us to get lost. We begged. It did no good.

We got back in the Taxi and went to Phil' school to call from there. He answered the phone.

"Alan did not wake up and we were coming over now," I said.

We showed up at his door again and there was still no response. We knocked. We banged. We just about kicked the door down. Finally we heard him coming to the door. He practically ripped the thing of the hinges, "What do you want!" He screamed.

“Pat wants to check her Internet here,” I said. There was silence. Nobody said a word. Nobody moved. A minute passed. There was hesitation. “Alright, Pat,” I said, “Let’s go to my place and you can check Internet there.”

I figured that Phil had been up late the night before talking with Alan’s parents. When we had left, he still had to relay information to them.

I turned on my computer and showed Pat how to get connected to the Internet. I had to be at the police station at 3 PM, but I had some time to kill. I decided to lay down and sleep a bit. First, I called a taxi, told it meet us at my apartment building at 2:30, and lay down.

When I woke up, it was past noon. I went to check on Pat and she was asleep too. I looked over and there laid Sarah. She was talking to herself. However, she was obviously using sign language. She was signing to herself. It was as fascinating as it was cute.

I made a few calls around. One was to the European Medical Center in Moscow. I wanted advice on Alan’s condition. We were thinking about taking an ambulance from European Medical Center. A man there agreed to call Alan’s hospital, talk to the doctors, listen to the report on Alan’s condition, and give us his recommendation. I told him I would call back in a few hours to see what he found out.

At 3:00 I had to be at the Police Station so that they could interview Pat. It was 2:30. We were really pushing the time.

Just then Sasha called me. He was my Russian tutor’s son. He wanted to use my computer.

“Sasha,” I said, “I am leaving in 5 minutes”

“But,” he said, “I have a paper that is very important and I need to get it done. It is due soon.”

“Fine, Sasha. Here is what we will do. You can come over and use my computer under one condition.

You can use my computer if you agree that I can lock you in my apartment and you do not leave until I get back.”

“Okay,” he said not questioning anything. He knew very well that the Friday before I had learned that my landlord’s son was coming over to my apartment and taking showers while I was on vacation. My landlord had given him permission and the keys. I didn’t know who the son was. I had never met him. And, not only did he take showers at my apartment, he found my computer (despite the fact I had hid it), used it, and drained the battery. Who knew what else he did? I was having a hard time trusting people lately.

“Be here in five minutes,” I told Slova. He must have run. He arrived in 3 minutes.

I locked him in my apartment and went downstairs. We took the Taxi to the police station and Anna and Phil met us there. Anna was to translate for Pat. Phil and I were not to be there. Pat was very nervous. She wanted to know what kind of questions they were going to ask and how she should respond to them. She was very worried about being tricked and eventually getting caught in a lie.

She had seen enough Russian films. She probably saw films like Spies Like Us. She knew how Russian police operated. She knew that the police had the ability to twist words around, and before you knew it, you were eating your words. She had things figured out. She knew Russia.

“Why is she so nervous,” I asked Phil, “all she has to do is answer things truthfully.”

“It probably had something to do with the missing bottle of pills,” he said. The bottle of pills! I had forgotten about those.

“What are you getting at?” I asked.

“They are gone. The police haven’t seen them. The doctors haven’t seen them. You don’t know where they are. I don’t know where they are. They are gone.”

“And?”

“And she is afraid that she will get in trouble. Make of it what you will.”

“Are you insinuating that she gave him the pills?”

“Yes.”

We talked and agreed that it was very strange. The bottle of pills had Pat's name on it. The pills were prescribed to her a year earlier. We didn't want to jump to conclusions, but we could not understand why Alan would supposedly "steal" the pills a year ago and not take them when he stole them. Why would he decide to take them once and for all a year later and in her presence immediately upon arriving in Russia? Chances are she gave the pills to him. They made him feel better. He wanted more. He helped himself to them. He overdosed. It only made sense.

We went into the orphanage. I needed to make a phone call to European Medical Center and find out what they found out when they called the hospital. I didn't want to make the call at the orphanage, but there was no other place to do it. We went in and tried to avoid the sad looks from the kids. It was hard. We couldn't avoid the questions.

"How is Alan?"

"He's fine."

"Is he dead?"

"No"

"Is he going to die?"

"Right now he is fine."

"But, is he going to die?"

"Right now he is fine." I couldn't lie to the kids. I couldn't say that he wasn't going to die if indeed he was. All I could say was, "Right now he is fine."

I wanted to use a phone away from people and rather discreetly. But, the next thing I knew, I was in the director's office using a phone there." We didn't say anything of importance to her either. We just answered her questions the same way I answered the kids: cautiously.

I called the doctor. "I have contacted the hospital in Uglich," he said. "They told me how he has been doing the past three days. It doesn't look good. He has a very minimal chance of survival. The drug Welbutrin should not have the effect on him that it has had on him. He should have woken up the second day. There is something else going on in his body. I don't know what, but something. If you want him to live you must absolutely get him to Moscow right now. You don't have a choice. But, I must say that there is no guarantee that Moscow can do anything. And, Let me just reiterate his chances of survival are very slim."

I relayed the information to Phil. "He is pretty much dead. He is going to Moscow. If he dies in Moscow, fine. We did everything we could. I just don't want him to die on our hands. That is something we will be difficult to deal with. Let's tell Pat at dinner to get her bags together. We are going to Moscow."

Pat wanted Katya to go to dinner with us. We went to get her and met Anna and Pat at a Caucasian restaurant that we had agreed upon ahead of time. Since Katya was there, we didn't even dare mention the word "Alan" in front of her.

When we were done with dinner, we asked Katya to leave. We sat Pat down told her that we were going to Moscow. I could see her glands swell and she swallowed. Then she simply said, "Okay, but I want to see Alan first before the ambulance arrives."

"Fine," we said. "We'll go to the hospital."

I had a temporary fleeting thought about Sasha in my apartment using my computer. But, then it was gone.

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Anna went home. Phil went to call the parents and tell them that we were sending Alan to Moscow. I was glad that I did not have the role that he had. I was dealing with people on a diplomatic level: the Embassy, the doctors, Peace Corps, and so forth. He had a much more difficult job. He had to deal with the parents.

He had to explain everything to them and do it in such a way where he would not worry them, offend them, or even give them false hopes. He must have done a good job. And in return, the message he always received was always encouraging, "We understand. Just do what you think is best."

Pat, Sarah, and I went to the hospital. We thought that this would be a simple repeat of last night. We were wrong.

We were able to get through the main doors and go all the way to the forbidden room. We rang the doorbell. "I am sorry, you can't come in," the nurse said.

"Damn," I thought, "Last night we were able to go straight in. We should have pushed our bribe some more this morning. This group of nurses probably feels cheated and therefore they'll be difficult."

I relayed to Pat in English what the nurse had said and a look of horror struck her face. "No," Pat said, "I have to go in there and see him."

I tried to negotiate with the nurse. It was useless. She pretty much said, "There is absolutely no way that you are coming in here."

I begged more.

"We just want to go in for 5 minutes."

"You can't."

"Just give us five minutes."

"No."

"Please."

"No, come back tomorrow."

Pat was nagging me. She wanted me to relay something.

"We have a young, deaf, slightly retarded girl that will literally go crazy if she doesn't get a chance to see Alan. We can't afford to have her screaming and hollering all night. Please just give us five minutes," I said

"I am sorry. But, you can't come in here," the nurse said.

"They let us in yesterday."

"Come back tomorrow during visitor's hours."

"We can't wait that long. We need to see him now." I didn't want to mention the fact that Phil was at his house calling an ambulance as we spoke.

"Sorry."

"Five minutes."

"No."

We couldn't get in. That was the rule. Pat kept on it. "Tell her that we have to go in. We are going in there whether she likes it or not!"

I turned back to the nurse.

"Look, we just want to go in for 5 minutes. We will be in and out real quick. We will go in one at a time like you prefer."

"Sorry, but we can't let you in."

"Why not?"

"You need permission from the head doctor," she said.

"Then ask him."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"He is in surgery."

"When will he be out?"

"In two hours."



I told Pat. She didn't like it. The door to the forbidden room started to shut. I put my foot in it to stop it.

"Look, Alan may be leaving this hospital tonight. We need to see him before he goes."  
"I am really sorry," she said, "but you can't come back here."

"I thought," Pat said to me, "that they told us the bribe was enough for two shifts of doctors."  
"They did," I said, "but it doesn't matter."  
"Look," she said, "I have a friend in there that is dying. This hospital is lousy. These doctors don't know what they are doing. Nothing is going to keep me from going in there to see my friend!"

I didn't want to deal with Pat. I was tired. I wanted to go home.

Just then there was voice from behind. It was another nurse. She was about halfway down the hall screaming at me at the top of her lungs. I didn't know what she was saying. Her voice was loud and screechy. It hurt my ears. I didn't care to listen to it. My head started to pound. I didn't want to be there. I wanted to go home.

Pat was flipping out. She ordered me to translate more. I was defeated. We couldn't go in there. It was the rule. We were trying to break it. We couldn't. That was that. I tried to explain that to Pat. She didn't care. She insisted. I was annoyed.

"I know your friend is dying," I said to Pat, "but you still need to have respect for the culture. You can't come in here with your American attitude throwing money around and demanding that everything be the way you want it. You are in Russia, not America."

Pat didn't care. I turned back to the nurse. My frustration with Pat was starting to be reflected onto the nurses.

"If Sarah doesn't see Alan tonight she is going to scream all night!"  
"That's not our problem."  
"Just five stinking minutes!"  
"No."  
"Come on! Please don't make this more difficult than it needs to be."

I didn't know what to do. Things were bad. I had a nurse that wouldn't let us visit Alan regardless of the situation. I had Sarah staring at me with wild eyes not having a clue about what was happening. I had Pat barking orders at me, demanding I translate. I had a nurse down the hall yelling at me at the top of her lungs. It was almost 9:00 PM. I had been dealing with Alan all day. I was tired. I didn't want to be there. And to top it all off, my foot was stuck in door. I was not enjoying this. I really wanted to go home.

Just then another nurse yelled down the hall. I had a phone call. "What's going on?" I thought. "Who is calling me at the hospital?"

I walked down the hall to the secretary's room. I endured a small lecture. I learned that the phone was not to be used for casual conversation. When the secretary was done yelling at me, I picked up the phone. It was Phil.

"What a pain," he said.  
"What?"  
"It took me 5 minutes to convince the lady that answered the phone to put you on."  
"Well, I'm here."  
"The ambulance is ordered. It will be at the hospital at 1:00 AM."  
"Great."  
"How's Alan?"  
"We can't see him."

“Why not?”  
“I don’t know. I have to go.”  
“Let me know what happens.”  
“Okay.”

I hung up and went back to the chaos and told the nurse that an ambulance was on its way and asked if we could see Alan before he left. She refused.

“Besides,” she said, “it won’t do you any good.”

“What do you mean?” I asked

“He is in a coma.”

“So?”

“He can’t hear you.”

“Yes he can.”

“No he can’t.”

“Are you kidding?”

“No, people in a coma can’t hear,” she said.

I didn’t dare ask her how she woke up in the morning. She obviously didn’t use an alarm clock. Her ears never worked when she slept.

We needed a new approach. Pat looked at me and said, “Call the police.”

“Are you serious?” I asked.

“Go call them.”

I don’t know what I was thinking. I should have just gone home. That’s all I wanted to do. Instead I walked into secretary’s room and asked for the phone. I knew this was going to get ugly.

After yet another lecture, I asked for the number to the police. She wouldn’t give it to me. I didn’t care. I started dialing the emergency numbers I knew. 01. 02. 03. Realizing that I would eventually get it right, the secretary gave the number to me.

“Is this the police,” I said.

“Yes.”

“Please come to the hospital. We have a problem.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Just come down here.”

“Put the secretary on.”

“Just come down here,” I said. I didn’t want the secretary to turn the police away.

“Put the secretary on.”

“Fine.” I handed the phone to the secretary.

The secretary talked to the police a bit and then hung up. “Are they coming,” I asked. Silence. “Are they coming,” I said but much louder. “Yes!” she screamed.

I went down to tell Pat that the police were on their way. She was happy. We walked down the hallway and sat near the secretary’s office to wait. I decided that if the police were coming, I should probably call Anna again to be a translator.

The secretary didn’t like the fact that I was using the phone so much. I waited out her lectures, pulled the phone from her hands, and then called.

“Hi Anna.”

“Hi Eric, how are you?”

“Fine. Can you do me a favor?”

“What?”

“Come to the hospital?”

“Why, what’s the matter?”

“I called the police and they are on their way.”

“Oh, my God,” she said and hung up.

I never understood why Russians don’t say “goodbye” or anything to signal that they are about to hang up. I always have more to say, but never get to say it. I always get hung up on before I have a chance to spit it out. For that reason, I was missing vital information from Anna. Specifically, how long it would take her to get to the hospital. I assumed, “Oh, my God,” meant that she was on her way, but I wasn’t positive.

I went back to Pat and Sarah and waited for the police. Sarah was moaning. Pat was shaking violently. A few minutes later, an officer arrived.

I shook his hand and introduced myself. He was fairly nice. I explained the situation to him.

“We have an ambulance coming at 1:00 AM to pick up Alan and take him to Moscow. We just want to go in and see him and say goodbye. Poor little Sarah needs to see him or she will go crazy. We are asking for five minutes for her, and that’s it.”

He went and talked to the nurses and came back.

“Sorry,” he said, “But I can’t let you in.”

“There is nothing you can do?”

“I would really like to let you guys in, but I am sorry, I can’t.”

“Can’t you do anything?”

“One second.”

He went back to talk to nurses. Anna showed up. It was good timing.

“I would like you guys to see him,” the officer said through Anna, “I understand your position, but I can’t authorize it.”

“Why not?”

“Because it is after visitors hours.”

“How do we get permission to go in there?”

“You have to ask the head doctor.”

Just then the phone rang. It was for me. The nurse had given up fighting. She simply told me I had a call and gave me the phone. It was Phil.

“Eric...”

I cut him off and said, “Phil get here right now.”

“Why?”

“The police are here.”

“Why?”

“I called them.”

“Oh, boy. I’ll be there soon. But you need to know that the ambulance isn’t coming.”

“Why not?”

“I had to turn it around.”

“Why?”

“Alan doesn’t have enough money to cover it. And as you know he has no insurance.”

“This is ridiculous. Tell me more when you get here.”

I hung up.

As soon as I realized I hung up the phone without saying goodbye, I knew I was becoming Russian. I went back to the policeman.

“Let’s ask the head doctor,” I said through Anna.

“You can’t,” the officer said.

“Why not.”

“It’s late. She’s at home.”

“But we need to see Alan.”

“Well, you are going to have to wait until 1:00 AM. When the ambulance crew gets here, they may or may not let you see him.”

The phone rang again. This time it was Sasha. I had forgotten all about him.

“Eric come home.”

“I will be there soon.”

“Your computer is broken,”

“It’s not broken Sasha,” I said.

“Yes. I can’t type.”

I realized that I had probably forgotten to show him how to change the keyboard setting so that he could type in Russian. I didn’t care to deal with Sasha at this moment in time, but none-the-less I tried to explain how to flip the computer to the Cyrillic alphabet. He didn’t understand.

“Sasha, I have to go.”

“Eric, hurry home.”

“I am trying Sasha, I am trying.”

“Hurry.”

“Just wait.”

I hung up.

I went back to policeman. Anna had been talking to him. I turned to Anna.

“Anna,” I said “This would be so easy, if he just gave us five minutes.”

“But, he can’t Eric.”

She was right. Nothing could be done. The policeman decided to leave. He more or less said “work it out yourselves, I am leaving.”

That was a shock to me. I thought something always occurred as result of a policeman’s presence. Usually someone is forced to do something or forced not to do something. Sometimes there is an arrest. But, I have never seen a policeman say, “You guy work it out yourself” especially when one person is clearly breaking rules.

I tried to stop the policeman as he was leaving. He just wanted to go home. He didn’t care to deal with little American pests. I stood in front of the doorway, didn’t let him through, and had Anna translate, “Just make them give us the phone number to the head doctor. I will call her myself.”

“Fine,” he said. Back he went. He ordered the secretary to give him the phone number to the head doctor.

She became irate. She threw open a file cabinet, tossed open a book, ripped out half the pages, and found the number. She gave it to the police officer. The police officer pulled Anna aside and said, “I will give you this phone number under one condition: you do not call from this hospital.” Anna agreed, got the phone number, and gave it to me. We thanked the police officer and he left.

Pat sat on a bench just shaking. She constantly wanted to know what was going on, but only ever got bits and pieces. She looked like death was about to reach out and grab her. Sarah sat calm and patient, but completely confused.

Since Anna had promised the officer we would make the call elsewhere, we had to leave the hospital. We went to the school that Anna and Phil worked at and knocked on the door. Although it was 8:30 at night, their principal was still there. He let us in.

We went to the phone and sat down. Anna contemplated what she was going to say to the doctor and then called.

The doctor said that since I was the only one that was calm and rational in the hospital at that point in time I could go and visit him. I should have taken the offer, but I didn't. I did not care to see Alan. I wanted Pat and Sarah to see him.

Anna told the doctor exactly what I told her. "Eric doesn't want to see him. Eric wants Pat and Sarah to see him," she said. The doctor said that she was going to call the hospital and told Anna to call back in five minutes.

Anna's boss was listening to the whole thing. He was upset. He decided to come over and voice his opinion. He told me I was ridiculous. He told me that Americans think that they can do whatever they want. Americans think they have more power than anyone else and can do whatever they want. Americans walk around like they own the world. Americans have no respect for people of another culture.

I stopped him. "I know," I said "I hate Americans too."

He relaxed. He told me that his mother died in that hospital a few years earlier. He wanted to see her, but couldn't. They wouldn't let him in. She died without him.

Now I understood. If we were able to go in and see Alan, he would be disgraced. It was as if he didn't do enough for his mother. Now I understood why he hated the attitude of Americans that think they can get whatever they want. "If we get in," I thought, "We are not only disgracing the Russians. We are disgracing the Americans as well."

Anna called the head doctor again. She was furious. "How dare you do what you've done," she told Anna, "You've disrupted the entire hospital. Now no one can go in. Not even Eric." I hung my head.

We went back. They were right. What was I doing? If Alan wants to kill himself, fine. He chose to do it in Russia. He is no better than Russians. He deserves no better treatment than Russians do. He is no better than other moms and dads in Russia that die without anyone by their side, especially their children.

We walked back inside the hospital. Phil had arrived. Things were quiet and peaceful. Everyone in the hospital knew the end result of the conversation with the head doctor.

We walked down to the end of the hall to pick up few things remaining there. For the sake of it, we rang the doorbell to the forbidden room.

A different doctor came out. "Can we go in and see Alan?" we asked. He looked around and hesitated. "Okay," he said, "one person. Three minutes only."  
"Can both Pat and Sarah go," I asked.  
"Okay. Only three minutes."

Phil and I waited outside. Pat and Sarah came out of the forbidden room two minutes later. They had not gotten a response from Alan. He was still in a coma.

It was all for nothing. I felt disgraced. I felt bad for all the dying mothers and fathers in Russia that could not see their children. I hated Americans.

As we walked out of the hospital, I made a special effort to stop each nurse who had witnessed the spectacle and apologize. Surprisingly, half accepted my apology. The other half ignored me.

Pat wanted us to make one more phone call. She wanted a taxi. "Sorry, Pat," we said. "You are not taking a taxi. We are making the 10 minute walk home."

Pat complained the whole way to Phil's apartment in her slow, creaky, drawn out voice. "It's cold. Why is there so much snow? I don't know how people fucking live here. The hospital is ridiculous. It smells. The bathroom is dirty. They should have just let us in right away. That says a lot about Russia. They make life difficult. How can people live here? Sarah can't see. It gets dark too early. We should have just taken a taxi. I keep slipping. Where the hell is your apartment Phil?" And on, and on, and on.

The only thing I was thinking about was poor Sasha. He was still at my apartment.

"Oh yeah," Phil said. I forgot to tell you that Sasha called twice while you were at the hospital. I told him to call you there."

"I know," I said, "How much did the Ambulance want?"

"\$7,000"

"How much money does Alan have?"

"\$7,000."

When we got to Phil's and I immediately hopped on the phone. I called Sasha.

"Where are you, Eric?"

"Hang on Sasha. I will be there in twenty minutes."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

We still had a lot to talk about, but I needed to get back and let Sasha out of my apartment. So, Phil and Pat and Sarah agreed to come to my place. We called a taxi, went to the store to buy some more dry, white, wine for Pat and went to my place.

When we got to my place, I ran up the stairs as if the next 30 seconds made a difference compared to the past 8 hours Sasha had spent at my apartment.

I went in. Sasha was glad to see me. Incredibly glad. He was almost free. He took me to my computer and indeed it was broken. "That's weird," I thought, "Pat never said a word to me." But, it wasn't a huge problem. The AC adapter was shot and the battery had drained. That meant that sometime between when Pat stopped using the computer and Sasha come over, I received a power surge. It was feasible. Strange, but I didn't care to think about it. It was the second time my computer was hit by a surge. Besides, Pat didn't know enough to ruin it.

"I didn't break your computer Eric," Sasha said.

"I know you didn't," I said.

"Trust me," he said. I didn't like those words. Pat used that phrase far too much.

"There is no way you could have done anything, Sasha. Don't worry."

He was still scared. I told him to relax.

"What have you been doing for the past 8 hours?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"I'm sorry."

He accepted my apology and left. I couldn't believe it. My computer received a surge. The surge protector did nothing for it. It was a lousy ending to an even lousier evening.

I went into my kitchen and my dishes were sparkling clean. Poor Sasha was so worried about breaking my computer that he did my dishes for me. "Thanks Sasha," I quietly said out loud. I was exhausted. Defeated. Ashamed. Everything.

We popped open the bottles of dry, white, wine that we bought. We sat down to drink and talk. We needed to figure out something to save Alan's life.

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“Well, it's not only a matter of life or death,” Phil said, “It is a matter of money. That's the way it always is. Money is more important than life, I guess. Mom and Dad can't afford to lose their house over their son's life. He is not going to go to Moscow. He's going to die. I guess that's too bad.”

“I am sure they would have sacrificed their house the first time,” I said, “It is just when it is the 12<sup>th</sup> time, it's a little hard. They probably sacrificed eleven other things before.”

We sat around drinking. The conversation was casual. The mood was light. We were no longer mad at Pat. We had calmed down. She was ignorant. Just an ignorant American. That's all. Nothing too terrible. Just an American.

We had had a pretty crazy three days. Three days that we did not expect to have. But, it was three days that was sure to make it into our journals. “When he dies,” we said, “we'll try not forget about him.”

We just couldn't believe that there was nothing we could do.

“Why doesn't Alan have insurance?” we wondered.

“He can't afford it,” Pat said.

“It has got to be a lot cheaper than paying for an ambulance out of your pocket.”

“Not when you are on the medication that he is on.”

“What do you mean?” we asked.

“The price of insurance goes through the roof when you are on anti-depressants. He can't afford it.”

“And I guess the fact that he's attempted 12 times doesn't help either.”

“No,” Pat said.

Phil and I started to philosophize.

“Well Alan should be glad that Russia had socialized medicine,” I said.

“Yup,” He said.

“It is just a shame that there is such a huge discrepancy between care in different cities.”

“No doubt.”

“The idea of socialized medicine is not necessarily a bad one. Other countries, like Sweden seem to pull it off quite well,” I said.

“Well, America does have a bit of socialized medicine too.”

“Yeah, of course, to an extent.”

“For instance in California we have MediCAL.”

Then it hit Phil. “MediCAL. They insure Californians in emergencies. Alan is from California. This is an emergency. Will they insure Californians even if they are not in California?”

“Maybe, just Maybe,” Pat said. She knew someone who worked for MediCAL. Wow! This was going to work nicely.

It was 10:30 PM in Russia. That meant it was 11:30 AM in California. Pat got on the phone to call a friend of hers in America to get the phone number to MediCAL. That led to a comment I didn't care to hear. When her friend picked up the phone, the first words out of her mouth were, “Help! I am in Russia!” I despised that comment. I wanted to say in retaliation, “Help Russia, Pat's here!”

Pat spent a long time calling. “I am sure to have an expensive phone bill,” I thought. She called her friend in America many times and shot the breeze complaining about Russia. She called MediCAL numerous times, got transferred a number of times, and talked to many different departments there as well. After a while it became clear. This was yet another dead end. We gave up. It was late and we were tired.

Instead of going all the way home, Phil decided to sleep at my place. I took Pat to her place and then walked back.

We made a few more phone calls. One was to his parents to let him know that the ambulance had indeed been turned around and that we were going to try and explore other options. We weren't quite sure what the options were, but we would try.

We agreed that if Alan did pull through this, he had to be kicked out of the country. It was not safe for him to be around kids. Every time he flipped out, he made himself look real bad. Children, especially from an orphanage, did not need to be exposed to this. It was a great that he had such a good program, but he needed to get someone else to do it."

"I will gladly carry on Alan's program if he dies," Phil said. "Or if he survives, and leaves I will carry it on for him as well."

"But we don't know he will leave."

"The Embassy is not going to let him stay. They will kick him out and tear up his visa."

"And he will go buy another one like he did last time," I said.

"Last time?"

"Yes, last time the orphanage tried to get his visa revoked."

"And he is still around?"

"Yup."

I agreed that the next morning at 7:30, before the nurses got off their shift, I would get up and call the hospital to see what happened with Alan overnight. Again, we thought that just maybe he would wake up.

By the time we got to sleep it was well past 2:00 AM.

#### Day 4 – Thursday March 1<sup>st</sup>

I woke up at 7:30 to call and ask about Alan. It was pointless. Of course he didn't wake up. I went back to sleep.

At 11:30 the phone rang. Who could it be? I didn't care to answer it. I decided to let it go. But, it rang and rang. Eventually Phil got sick of listening to it and got up to answer it. It was Alan's parents. They wanted to know whether Alan had woken up or not.

We then made a few more phone calls. We called God to tell her that Alan did not go on the Ambulance, it had to be turned around, and that he was still in a coma. She told me to wait by the phone. She was going to make a few phone calls on my behalf.

Phil ran to get food at a local store. The phone rang. It was Pat. Apparently her phone miraculously started to work again. I wished my computer would miraculously work again as well.

"I want to go to the hospital. Will you come over and take me?" Pat said. "It's non-stop," I thought but what I said was, "We'll be over there in about an hour." She didn't have a choice. She had to wait.

When Phil got back with food for breakfast, I told him Pat had called.

"One of has to stay by the phone. One of has to go take Pat to hospital."

"Let's flip a coin," he said.

"No," I said, "I have been in charge of her for the past few days. It's your turn."

"Fine."

We made breakfast and Phil left to go take care of Pat.



The phone rang. I answered it. It was the assistant director for Peace Corps. I briefly informed him of everything and he said that he would have the Embassy call me.

Five minutes later they did. The man I was talking to was very friendly and helpful. First he congratulated me on representing the best of America and then said he wanted to know all about what was going on. I told him. He said he would have the appropriate people call me back.

Ten minutes later, someone else from the embassy called me. He also wanted to know everything. I started to explain, but I was cut off.

“Now, did you say the name is Alan Hindman?”

“It is.”

“Did he live in Uglich last year?”

“He did.”

“Did he attempt suicide last year?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we know all about him. We have a pretty big file on him.”

“Well, that’s comforting, I guess. But, I didn’t realize he was so famous.”

“Oh, he is quite famous. I specifically remember dealing with the case last year.”

So, Alan’s previous attempts hadn’t gone unrecorded.

“Well, can’t you do anything about it,” I asked.

“What do you mean.”

“Well, he is still around.”

“That’s his choice.”

“You can’t kick him out of the country.”

“No, we can’t kick him out of the country,” he said.

“You have got to be kidding me,” I said.

He explained.

“There are only two ways that a person can be kicked out of the country. The first is that the person has to be declared mentally incompetent. This is very difficult to do. He really won’t be declared mentally incompetent in Russia if he hasn’t been declared mentally incompetent in America.”

“What’s the second way.”

“The second way that he can be kicked out of the country is if he committed a crime. He hasn’t.

Attempting suicide is not against the law.”

“But it proves he is mentally incompetent.”

“Well, actually, there is no way to prove that he attempted suicide on his own and nobody forced him to take the pills. You can initiate an investigation to prove it if you want, but believe me, it is not worth it”

“So what do we do.”

“The only way you can make him leave is by convincing him to go.”

“What about the ambulance service. Can you help us out with that.”

“No. I can give you phone numbers, connections, and so forth, but financially we can’t help.”

“What if he dies?”

“We will ship his body to America. Do you know where to ship it to,”

“No.”

“Well, don’t worry about that right now. We will worry about that if the time comes.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“You bet. Let me dig up the file on Alan and make a few phone calls for you. Call me back, okay?”

“You mean you don’t have the file in front of you.”

“No, I just remember Alan.”

I thanked him for his help and we hung up.

God called again and wanted to know if I was in touch with the Embassy. We then talked more about the recent turn of events.

After talking to God, I called another ambulance service. They wanted the same amount of money as the first.

I called another Ambulance service. Same story.

I called the embassy. I told the secretary what I was calling about, and was put straight through. They wanted more information on Alan. The drugs taken, how long he had been out, and on and on. Eventually I hung up.

I called another ambulance service. They said that maybe they could come and get him, but they would have to call around and find a hospital first. They would call back.

The embassy called. They wanted the phone number to the hospital where Alan was.

The ambulance service called to tell me that it was going to be too expensive.

God called to find out details.

I called the embassy for information.

Phil called to tell me that they were now heading back to the apartment.

The embassy called to say they were in contact with the hospital and were looking for an ambulance service.

I called another ambulance service.

The embassy called.

I called them back.

I spent three hours on the phone. My ear was resting on 15 to 20 second intervals. When I called the embassy, it got to the point where I would simply say my name, Alan, or Uglich, and I was put right through to appropriate people.

The phone rang again. I didn't want to answer it. I wanted to rest.

“Hello,” I said.

“Hello, is this Eric Schempp?” the voice on the other end said.

“Yes.”

“My name is Dima,” he said. Names didn't mean anything to me. I had talked to too many people in too short a time.

“Nice to meet you,” I said.

I understand that you need an ambulance.”

“Yes.”

“I am with Global Voyager Assistance. We can have an ambulance there tonight.”

“How much will it cost.” I was ready for the real bomb.

“\$1,700,” he said.

“That's it! You have got to be kidding me.”

“Not at all. We know all about Alan. We have called your hospital. We know exactly what he needs. We also understand your financial situation. We are in the process of looking for a hospital that will be adequate and meet your financial concerns.”

“Wow!”

“I have two different hospitals in mind. I will call you back.”

I hung up and called Phil. There was no answer. I called the Hospital. They weren't there. “Damn it,” I thought, “Where are they?”

Dima from Global Voyager Assistance called back.

“One hospital will take him,” he said, “the other one won’t”

“Why won’t the other one take him.”

“They don’t deal with suicides because they are mentally incompetent people.”

“Tell the embassy that.” He didn’t understand my point.

“Here’s our one condition. We must have the money in hand before the ambulance leaves.”

“How do we get it to you,” I asked.

“How long does it take to get to Uglich?” he asked.

“Four hours,” I said.

“We will have someone at your doorstep in four and a half hours.”

“Whoa, Whoa, Whoa...I need to ask permission first.”

“You don’t have time to ask permission. We know your situation,” he said.

“Sorry, I must. I will call you back.”

I hung up.

I called Phil. There was still no answer. “Where could they have gone?”

I sat down and tried to think.

I decided to call God and explain the situation to her

“Eric, if you found an ambulance, great. Take it. Right now.”

“But I need to ask permission.”

“No, don’t. Please don’t wait around to ask permission. Order the ambulance.”

“But, they may be back any minute.”

“If you talk to them, they may decide they don’t want it. I am telling you that you have to have it. Call the ambulance. Now.”

“Okay,” if you say so.

I hung up.

I picked up the phone. I hesitated. I put it back down. I didn’t want to be the only one making the decision. I was not the one in contact with the parents. Phil was. I needed to ask permission.

I called Global Voyager Assistance.

“You want the Ambulance?” Dima asked.

“Give me another 20 minutes,” I said.

I went and lay down and closed my eyes. I didn’t know what was going on. Alan didn’t either. He didn’t have any idea of the chaos surrounding him.

I got up and called Phil. No answer. I lay back down.

Ten minutes later I tired again. Nothing.

Thirty minutes later I tried again. Nothing.

Five minutes later the phone rang. It was Phil.

“Where have you been!” I yelled.

“Hey man relax. I had to go buy diapers.”

“Diapers?”

“The nurse made me go buy diapers for Alan.”

“Whatever. Listen. I got an ambulance. \$1,700. It will be here tonight. What do you think?”

“Go for it,” he said.

“There are no problems doing this?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Everyone one will be cool with it?”

“I hope so.”  
“Okay. I am calling it.”  
“Great.”  
I hung up.

I called Global Voyager Service.

“We want the ambulance,” I told him.  
“Okay. We will have someone in Uglich to collect the money in 4-5 hours. Where can you meet?”

I told him. Everything was done. Almost done. Five minutes passed. The phone rang. It was Phil.

“Pat doesn’t want the ambulance to go,” he said.  
“What!” I yelled.  
“She wants to wait until tomorrow.”  
“Why?”  
“I don’t know. She wants to wait until tomorrow.”  
“Why?” I screamed.  
“I’ll call you back. Meanwhile call the ambulance and tell them to wait.”

I was fuming. I called the Ambulance.

“Don’t send it,” I said.  
“You have got to be kidding me!” Dima said.  
“This is stupid, I know.”  
“It is not only stupid, it is dangerous.”  
“I know,” I said.  
“Look, here is the deal,” said Dima, “either the car goes now or not at all.”  
“Well.....” I didn’t know what to do. “Don’t send it.”  
“Here is what you can do. If you decided you want the ambulance. Come here and pay us and we’ll send it. It is getting too late to send someone out there to collect the money.”  
“Fine, okay,” I said.

I can’t believe Pat!” I thought, “This was ridiculous. We already turned one ambulance away and now this!”

I called Phil. He answered.

“What is going on,” I screamed.  
“Pat thinks that we should just wait until morning and then go from there,” Phil said.  
“I am sick of this,” I countered, “Why do we keep on putting this off one more day?”  
“It’s Pat. We are just supposed to trust her.”  
“What! Trust her? Why?”  
“I don’t know. She keeps saying, ‘Just trust me’”  
“Why? Why should I trust her!” I screamed.  
“You have no reason too.”  
“No! I seriously want to know her logic.”  
“I don’t know it. Why don’t you ask her yourself.”  
“I don’t want to,” I said, “And let’s think about this logically! There was an ambulance on the way yesterday! We turned it around! God thinks I am crazy for not calling the ambulance three days ago! Other doctors are telling me he has to go! The ambulance service can’t believe I am hesitating! I spent all day on the phone trying to find an ambulance! And we are not going to send him to Moscow because Pat of all people is saying, ‘Just trust me.’ No! I don’t want to trust her!  
“I agree with you that Alan should go to Moscow, but frankly, I don’t care.”  
“What is the point of having him stay here another night? He needs to go!”  
“I’ll tell Pat.”

“He needs to either stay here in Uglich indefinitely, or he needs to go to Moscow indefinitely. It’s one or the other. We pick one and we stick to it. If he stays in Uglich, tomorrow I damn well better not hear her complain.”

“I agree.”

“And if the decision is to stay in Uglich, she’d better never regret it. Even if he dies.”

“I’ll tell her.”

“Look, we keep on putting this off another day. One of these days he IS going to die!”

“That’s a given.”

“So why aren’t we going to Moscow?”

“Why don’t you talk to her?”

“Fine put her on.”

A minute later Pat was on the phone.

“What is the deal Pat. You don’t want Alan to receive the best care possible?” I asked.

“I just have a hunch,” she said.

“A hunch about what?”

“Just trust me.”

“Quit saying these ambiguous things. Say something substantial!”

“Eric, I just feel that we should wait until we see how he is tomorrow? Please just trust me.”

“Why?”

“It’s just a feeling.”

“Give me something logical.”

“Eric, I just think we should wait until tomorrow. Just trust me.”

“Put Phil back on.”

“Okay.”

Phil got on the phone.

“Can you believe this lady?” I asked.

“Eric, I agree with you 100%. Here is what I am going to do. I am going to call Alan’s parents and see what they have to say, okay.”

“Good idea.”

I hung up and waited. A long time passed. We were probably going to have to go to Moscow ourselves now that we procrastinated so long, but it was for the better. The parents were going to make the decision, not me. I felt much better. When he died, it would not be my fault. Twenty-five minutes later Phil called back.

“Here is what I did,” he said. “I called his parents. I told them my side of the story. Then I gave the phone to Pat and let her present her side. I hung up. Ten minutes later his parents called and gave us their decision.”

“And?”

“And they decided that it’s best to go to Moscow.”

“Okay, I guess we are in for a long night. I just wish we could have come to this decision a long time ago.”

“Me too.”

I called Global Voyager Services and let them know that we were on our way to Moscow. They said, the ambulance would be scheduled to leave at 8:00 AM. We had to get there at 7:00. If we weren’t there by 7:00, we lost the Ambulance.

It was settled. We were going to Moscow. That was that. Enough arguing, enough bickering. We were going.

Phil took a cab to Alan’s and dropped Pat off and told her to get her stuff ready. Then he came to my place. We debated for a little while about whether we were doing the right thing and then set about trying

to figure out how we would get to Moscow. We thought about the train, but that would put us in Moscow at 5:30 in the morning and Pat had a lot of stuff. Plus, we needed time to get ready and pack. It was 10 PM. The train was to leave at 10:30. We passed on the train idea.

We needed to find a car and we had restrictions. We needed a car that would fit four people and nine bags. We started calling. We called everywhere. We called all our friends. We called Anna and had her start calling. We called the director of the orphanage and had her call around. We called my tutor and had him start calling. We called restaurants. We called bars. We called everywhere.

Eventually calls started coming back. I would literally hang up the phone and another call would come through. Two different people found cars. We had to reject one. We didn't know which one. We picked one and went with it. I called the other back and told them not to come. They were mad. We accepted the other. The deal was 1800 Rubles up front and it would be at my apartment in a half and hour.

The ambulance service that we were going to go with, Global Voyager Assistance, insisted that we have the driver come in and talk to the secretary over the phone, because it was a difficult place to find.

The car arrived at 11:00 PM. We ran down to meet it. It was a nice van. Lot's of room for luggage and enough space for people. It was perfect. We ran the driver upstairs, called the ambulance service, had them give directions to our driver, and ran back down to the car.

We went to pick up Pat and Sarah. When we got there we ran all the way up to the top floor to get them. We grabbed their seven bags, threw them in the back of the van and we were off. It was to be a 5-hour trip to Moscow. Pat paid most of the 1800 rubles. I threw a little on top.

It was 11:30 at night. We were scheduled to get into Moscow in 5 hours. I tried to sleep, but it was pointless. The car bounced left and right.

#### Day 5 – March 2nd

At 4:45 AM in the morning we arrived to Moscow. Finally. We needed to have the money in Global Voyager Assistance's hands by 7 AM. We told the driver that we wanted to go to the Intourist hotel to drop off our stuff, and then to the Ambulance service. The driver didn't know where the Intourist was. We told him Red Square. He didn't know how to get there either. We had to stop along the side of the road and ask directions to Red Square. Red Square!

Eventually we made it. We unloaded our stuff and ran in. The driver agreed to wait while we checked in. Pat and Sarah watched the luggage. I went to the front desk to check in and drop off our passports and visas. Phil went to the ATM machine with Alan's ATM card to pull out money so that we could pay for the Ambulance.

The lady checking us in was incredibly slow. I went back to the luggage to talk to Pat and Phil. Phil informed me that Alan had a limit on his card and we could only pull out \$300.

“Well, that puts a kink in things.” I thought.

We needed to pay \$1800 to the ambulance service before they would even send the ambulance, and to get him into the hospital, we needed to pay \$500. The cost of the hospital was to be \$100 a night, but we needed to pay for the first five nights up front. The \$300 we pulled out and \$200 of cash that Alan had was enough to cover the hospital, but we still needed to actually get him there. But, then again, if we got him there and couldn't pay, what was the point.”

Our driver came into the hotel screaming. He had been waiting and was furious. We told him to wait more.

I ran to the front desk and asked to make a phone call. They told me to go around the corner. I ran around the corner, but there wasn't anything. I asked a security guard where the phone was. He told me to knock on a window that had a serious tint job done to it. It looked as though it was some huge security hangout.

I knocked. I waited. I knocked some more. I waited some more. Eventually, a very sleepy eyed woman opened the window. I could tell right off the bat that she was not in a good mood. I didn't care. The Intourist was supposed to be a somewhat ritzy place and I was beginning to learn otherwise.

I was rudely greeted by the phone lady. "What do you want?" she asked. I asked for the phone. She asked me where I was dialing. I told her Moscow. She asked me what number was. I told her. She dialed the number, despite my request to do it myself. She simply wouldn't let me do it. Furthermore, she sat with the phone next to her ear and waited until there was an answer. Then she handed it to me.

I talked to Dima of Global Voyager Assistance, the ambulance service we were going to use. I told him that we could not come up with the money, but we could give him \$300 with a promise to pay the rest later. No good enough, he said. He needed all the money up front. That is part of the deal. He suggested that we go to the Raddison Hotel and see if I could pull money off my credit card there.

We said goodbye to Pat and Sarah, and ran outside ready to profusely apologize to our driver. At first we were a bit flustered because he wasn't where he had parked earlier. But, we found the van quite a ways ahead. We ran up there, opened the side door, and proceeded to get in. The next second, some guy in the front seat was screaming and yelling at us. Oops. We were about to get in the wrong van.

"We must taken too long in the hotel and so our driver got fed up with us and ditched us," I said  
"Yeah, he had his money and probably figured he might as well just go. He more or less did what he said he would."

"True, we'll take a Taxi," I said.

"I am just glad we got rid of Pat,"

"Me too."

Phil and I thought everything was pretty funny. It was now 5:40 in the morning and we were starting to get delirious. The situation we were in was just too peculiar not to laugh. We rounded up a car in 30 minutes, came to Moscow, Arrived at 4:45 in the morning, tried to get money out of Alan's account to save his life but couldn't because he had a limit on his ATM card, got our pleading rejected by the ambulance service, and got ditched by our driver. Yes, it was virtually impossible not to laugh.

We went back into the Intourist and grabbed one of those driver's that block the doorway as people come in, hound tourists, and are incredibly expensive. But, using one of those taxi drivers was justified. We had a life to save.

Our taxi driver was cool. He could chat up a storm. He took us to the Raddison and we got there at about 5:45. We ran inside and asked where we can pull out money. We were told and ran to do it quickly. When we got there, there was no one there. We were a bit mystified. Then we saw a sign. Break: 5 AM to 6 AM. Just great. There are 24 hours in a day and they set their break for the one particular hour that we need them open. How fitting is that. This was too funny. We were rolling in tears laughing.

We sat down and opened a Moscow Times Newspapers and began reading. We did after all have ten minutes to kill. We figured that we might as well do something productive like get caught up on the days events. Our taxi driver came over and asked what was going on. We explained. He decided to sit down with us, relax, and a read a paper too.

At 6:00 on the dot the exchange window opened. I slipped them my credit card and asked for \$1800 in cash. The lady glared at me a second, but then punched my card into the machine. It was rejected. She tried a smaller amount. It was rejected again. She tried an incredibly small amount, and again it was rejected.

Phil and I both knew what the next step was. We didn't need to communicate. We had exhausted our last option. We got back into the taxi and told the driver to take us to Global Voyager Assistance. He asked, "What are you going to do now?" I didn't know the words for, "Beg and Plead," in Russian, so I simply showed him what we were going to do. Cry. He understood perfectly.

He took us here and there around this corner and that corner. Eventually, he told us we were at our destination. It was 6:20. We had 40 minutes to spare. He wanted 1500 Rubles. We laughed. 1800 Rubles to go from Uglich to Moscow and 1500 Rubles for an hour around Moscow. Typical. We paid him, got a receipt, and got out.

The taxi driver had told us to walk down this little alleyway and we would be there. I was glad we were going to be there soon. The early morning chill was really starting to get to me.

We walked to the end of the alleyway. There was nothing there. Nothing. We came back a little ways and went to the left. All there was, was a barking dog behind a fence. We went back out to the main road. Down the way a bit there was a guard. I didn't know what he was guarding. Maybe he was directing the early morning traffic that didn't exist. I didn't have a clue. None-the-less we stopped to ask him where the building was that we were looking for. He just shrugged his shoulders.

We went into a nearby building more to warm up more than anything. There was nobody inside. We opened a few doors and never found anyone. At least we could set our papers down, let our fingers unfreeze themselves, and figure out what to do next.

A few minutes later a drunk came waddling through a door. He was essentially the guard to the place. We started the talking. We asked where the building we were looking for was located.

"I don't know," he said.

"What is the address to this building," we asked.

"I don't know" he said, "I am not from here."

"You work here don't you" we asked.

"Yes," he said.

"You don't know the address?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I am not from here. I am from the Caucasus," he said

"You don't know what building number this is?"

"No." he said

"Do you know where you are?"

"No," the guard said.

We left.

We went back into the freezing cold. And it was cold! I couldn't shuffle through the directions I had with gloves on so I took them off. My fingers stung.

We had no idea why the taxi driver dropped us off where he did. However, we figured that using a little common sense might work. If we follow the numbers on the other buildings," we thought, "we would eventually get there." It seemed like an easy way to succeed.

We followed numbers. As they got bigger and bigger, we thought that we were getting closer and closer. Then all of sudden we came to a T-intersection and the numbers stopped. The area of town was one of those in which there were many different intersections, but all the intersecting roads had the same name. I never quite understood the purpose of that. I guess some idiot thought it would be a good practical joke some early morning when two foreigners wandered around looking for an ambulance service. I usually hate those same name intersections. In this case I despised them. We just couldn't win.

It was now almost 7:00. We really needed to hurry.



We decided to walk down the street. I was freezing. My body was violently shaking. I was miserable. After about 10 minutes we found what I guess could be called a sidewalk janitor. Her job was to clean the sidewalk with a broom made out of straw. However, it was a typical Russian straw broom where the top half of all the little straw pieces were tightly would together while at the bottom they were free to stick out in any which direction. This somehow allows the sweeper to pick up everything on the street. They are the most ineffective things known to man.

But I was happy to run into this sweeper lady. At least we could ask directions. I didn't question why she was using a Russian broom to clean an already clean street at 7:00 on a freezing cold February morning. I was simply happy she was there. My bones were starting to ache from the cold. My fingers hurt. My teeth were chattering. My American accent combined with the fact that my teeth were chattering must have sounded dreadful. I asked her where the ambulance service was. She told me she couldn't help me.

Phil just hung around. He didn't say much anymore. Things were no longer funny. He just stood there in a state of acceptance that we had tried to save Alan's life and failed.

I went to the second sweeper lady and asked her. She backed away from me and decided to go into her little shack. I followed her to the door. As soon as she opened it, I could feel the warmth coming out. It was almost hypnotic. I decided that I needed to get in there. I didn't care how or really why. All I knew was that I needed to get into the shack where it was nice, warm, and cozy. I would have done anything to get in there. That is all I wanted at that point in time. Nothing else mattered. I needed a nice, warm, place to lie down and sleep. I was really starting to lose my mind.

But the sweeper lady had other ideas. She wasn't going to let me in. I tried to get by her, but she held me off. I tried to squeeze by her, but it was pointless. I was not allowed to warm up. It was against the rules or something. I figured that I might as well ask where the ambulance service was. She pointed up the street a bit and said there was a hospital at a gate that we had walked by. I couldn't believe. We found it!

I didn't care about the nice, warm, shack anymore. The hospital was in sight. We almost ran there.

We got there and looked at the sign. It was indeed a hospital. We tried to open the gate. We couldn't. There was a lock on it. "What! How could this be?" we thought, "who locks a hospital." We sat there in complete silence for a minute. We couldn't believe what was happening. We were, cold, tired, and defeated.

The number of people on the street was starting to pick up. A man came by and proceeded to unlock the door. "Great!" we thought, "Now we can go into the hospital." But the man had different plans. He was going to lock the door behind him.

"All we want to do is use the phone," I said.

"No, you can't," He said.

"Please, Please" I begged, "I just want to make one phone call. Please."

"Sorry"

"Please, this is very important. Please."

"He looked at me a second then shut the gate."

I screamed in mere frustration into the air in much the same way a wolf would howl at the moon. Phil was already walking in the other direction, relaxed, obviously defeated. I turned around and started to walk too.

Then for no reason at all, I turned back around. I opened my mouth and yelled at the absolute top of my lungs, "I SAID PLEASE!!!!!!!" That did it. Phil was nearly in tears laughing again.

People were starting to fill the streets. They thought that they were going to enjoy a nice early morning stroll to work. They didn't expect to see some whack yelling, "I SAID PLEASE!!!" at the top of his lungs. Most stopped to stare.

We walked until we found a little store. I went in and asked to use their phone. "We don't have one," the store clerk said, "You have to go down to the corner and use those." I couldn't help but ask, "What do you do, if a bad person comes in and takes some food without paying. Do you use the phones at the corner?" She looked at me, and then pointed to the phones at the corner. We left and went to the phones at the corner.

We got to the phones. I whipped out my piece of paper with phone numbers on it and dialed. I talked to Dima. He said we still had time to get there. He started to give me directions to the place again when I cut him off.

"No, you are coming to get us," I said.

"Okay" he said, "Where are you?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Well describe something around you."

"There is a yellow building across the street."

"Not good enough," he said, "what else."

"Nothing," I said.

"There has got to be something."

Hang on I said. I put the phone down and ran around the corner. I came back and said, "There is a Chinese restaurant."

"Which Chinese restaurant?" he asked. I put the phone back down and ran around the corner again and looked. I came back and told him.

"That's not good enough," he said, "I need better directions." Right then, there was a man walking around the corner. Using the very familiar form (and rude when you don't know the person) in Russian, I said, "You. Come here." He was a bit shocked and jumped a bit. But, he came to the phone. I told him to tell Dima where we were. He gave directions. I thanked him and took the phone back. "Well," I thought, "If he has a boring repetitive job, at least he will have something to talk about when he gets to the office. There was some foreign whack asking directions to where he stood."

Dima agreed to come and meet us. He said he would make it to where we were in about five to ten minutes. We were to meet him at the corner. Phil stood at the corner and I stood at the entranceway to the Chinese restaurant just in case he came there. I stood right next to an old man selling bags on the street. I have no idea what he was doing up at 7:00 in the morning selling bags on the street. But I did admire his dedication to sell those bags.

A man showed up and looked around. He was a bit confused. He went up to the old man and asked, "Have you seen an American around here somewhere?" The old man looked at me. Then back at the man. He had this look on his face that said, "well, considering there are only two people in the near vicinity, I think we can figure this out. Using deductive reasoning, we can conclude that the kid standing next to me is the person you are looking for." But, instead of saying all that, the old man just pointed at me. I thought that was pretty funny.

Dima and I shook hands and he said he was looking for someone who looked more American than I did. "How is that for stereotypes of America," I thought. I didn't have my bright colors, tennis shoes, and North Face gear on, so I couldn't be American.

We went and got Phil and walked about 10 minutes until we got to the office. It's a good thing we called. There was no way we would have found that place on our own. When we got there we were offered coffee. We could not believe it. Now we were really dealing with high-class service. Coffee!

We sat down and told Dima that we did not have the money. He said, "well, I guess we will use your credit card then."

"We can do that?"

"Sure," he said. I was so relieved that I didn't think until later, "Why didn't he just tell us that in the first place? Instead he recommended other places that we could pull out money off my credit card. Strange."

The Ambulance was paid for. It was 7:30. We were told the ambulance would go out in about 30 minutes. They had rows and rows of equipment lined up ready to go. We were impressed. The ambulance would really be a little miniature hospital. I had a feeling that Alan would at least survive another few hours and not die in the Ambulance.

Dima sat us down to do a few more paperwork things. He told us they had decided to take him to different hospital. We didn't care. They were the professionals and what they said is what we did. It came time to sign more things. I signed here. I signed there. I put \$1800 on my credit card for Alan's sake. I really hoped that I would get that money back. I really wasn't too worried because we did have Alan's ATM card and his parents gave us his PIN number. If need be, I could stay in Moscow and pull out \$300 a day until I had it all back.

When the paperwork was done it was about 8:15. Dima asked us for our phone number at the Intourist. He was going to call us if anything more came up. He then said he would call us when Alan arrived to Moscow.

"Why," Phil asked.

"Don't you want to meet your friend?" Dima asked. Phil and I didn't even look at each other.

"No," we both said in unison.

We got on the Metro. We took it to Teatralnaya metro stop and got out. We slowly walked into the Intourist Hotel. We went in, got in the elevator, and went up to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor where Pat was staying. She had our bags. We got them and told her that the ambulance was sent. "Okay," she said. We went to our room. She didn't have any idea what we had been through. I had no desire to tell her.

It was about 9:00 by the time I fell asleep. The sun had just started to rise. The room was hot and stuffy and sleeping was difficult. I constantly woke up. At 1:00 PM the phone rang and woke me up yet another time. It was Dima.

"There were some problems at the hospital in Uglich. The ambulance did leave Uglich with Alan but they took an hour longer than anticipated. It's going to cost more."

"Why," I asked.

"There were some problems with the American population there."

"Oh," I said.

"Can I ask who the American population is?"

"That's us," I said.

"Oh," he said.

We agreed that we would settle the difference later. I went back to sleep.

At about 5:00 we were up and moving around. We agreed that it was not safe having Pat there alone at the hospital. We didn't care about her. We cared about the false stories that she would tell. Someone needed to go to the hospital, look at the place, report to both God and Alan's parents, and make sure that they knew that it was us who made the decisions, not Pat. We were the ones who had and would pay for everything and we were the one's who were in direct contact with the parents. Not Pat. She was dangerous.

Phil agreed to go. I slept some more. My girlfriend came over and I explained the entire situation to her. She, as always, would prove to be a huge help. Especially, in the translating area.

When Phil came back he gave us his report. The place looked very nice. Alan didn't die in the ambulance. He was still in a coma. The doctors appeared to be very professionally trained. One spoke a bit of English. The equipment they used looked good. Not perfect, but a thousand times better than what they were using in Uglich. Pat was there. He didn't talk to her much because he didn't care to. He talked mostly with the doctors. Pat was upstairs sleeping and she eventually came down to see him, but that was it. When he had observed the entire place, talked to the doctors, and saw Alan, he came back to the hotel.

We all went out to relax and drink a beer. Since we were not happy with the fact that the hotel was lousy and charged \$100/night, we decided to switch hotels the next day.

#### Day 6 – Saturday March 3<sup>rd</sup>

We were rudely awoken by a phone call from Pat. She wanted to know the status on Alan. I called the Hospital. Alan was no longer in a Coma. He didn't wake up, but he was doing better. Now he was only unconscious. That was a good sign.

I waited five minutes. Pat called back. She said that she was sure that Alan was going to die. This was despite the fact that his condition was improving. But, she knew better than anyone, including the doctors. She wasn't satisfied at all with the services at the hospital. They were not good enough. Alan needed American style care. "Just trust me," She said. She had a hunch. She knew better than the doctors. She worked on people like Alan before.

She had called Alan's parents and talked to them and told them that the hospital wasn't good enough. That was horrible news. Why was she calling his parents telling them false things? And now, the parents wanted a doctor to go out and see him and give a second opinion and his status. They didn't trust Russian doctors. They wanted an American to see him. A European doctor wasn't good enough either. It had to be American.

I didn't dare mention that if he wanted an American doctor to see him, then he should have attempted suicide in America. I didn't dare mention that Pat should not be talking to Alan's parents. I didn't dare mention that she was full of American arrogance. I didn't dare mention that she was the epitome of Americans. I didn't dare mention that she was why Russians hate Americans. And, I didn't dare mention that she was the definition of an Ugly American!

Since we were planning on leaving the hotel that day, I didn't pay for any prepaid phone calls. That's how the Intourist Hotel operated. You could receive phone calls, but to make any calls you have to go and prepay. And, it is supposed to be an elite hotel.

So, I had the order that I had to find an American doctor. This was ridiculous. I went out of my room in my socks and carried my shoes. I brought my list of phone numbers with me and went down to the tint colored window and prepared myself to deal with the mean phone lady that I dealt with earlier. However, I received a pleasant surprise. It was a somewhat nice phone lady.

I made one phone call to Global Voyager Service and asked how I could find an American doctor to go see him. I was referred to the European Medical Center. They told me to call the embassy. Once I reached the embassy I was referred to about 5 different people.

The phone lady didn't get mad at me for making so many phone calls. In fact she sympathized with me. A few years earlier her husband had died. He was in a hospital but she never got a chance to see him. When he died, she was not by his side. The hospital wouldn't let her in. The story sounded all too familiar.

I must have made 15 phone calls. I was on the phone for about an hour. I talked to God, to the European Medical Center, to Global Voyager Services, and many others. I just kept getting referred. I spent a lot of time with about 10 different people from the Embassy.

At one point I was told that I would be transferred to an Embassy Doctor, but nothing happened. I was about to hang up and call back when a voice came over the other end. It was obviously a bad connection. I explained that we were trying to get an American doctor to go see our friend who laid unconscious in a hospital in Moscow. He said that he would like to help, but at that exact moment, he was vacationing in Moldova and talking on his cell phone. I apologized for bothering him on his vacation, took the advice he gave, and hung up. The embassy was going to transfer me to another Embassy doctor in the Czech republic, but I declined. After a while I gave up.

Hanging up wasn't always easy. Whenever I talked to a US embassy official they always had to add some comment like, "I just want to say that you are really doing a good thing. I really want to thank you for helping this American. You really understand what it means to be an American. You represent the best of American Citizenship. Thank you." Bologna.

I went up to report to Pat. She asked me, "What's Moldova?" I ignored her and went to use her phone. Phil answered Pat for me, but he had to stop laughing before he was able to speak. "It's a country, Pat. The doctor is vacationing there right now."

Pat went off on how she knew all about Alan's condition and what was best for him and how he should be treated. "How do you know, Pat?" We asked.

"Just trust me."

Phil screamed at her, "Why? Why? Why should I trust you? You have given me absolutely no reason to trust you. If you can't give me a reason why I should trust you, then quit saying, 'just trust me!'"

I called God to see if she would go out and she him. I felt bad calling God on her day off, but she was as cheerful as always. She said that she would go out and she Alan, but it was not really her area. It would be better if we got someone else to do it. But, if we couldn't find anybody else, she would. Phil and I talked to God for about an hour passing the phone back and forth. She wanted to know all about Alan and his current condition and previous mental states. She wanted to know how we were associated to him. She wanted to know all about my scuffle with the Police. She wanted to know about, Pat, Sarah, and the orphanage.

The orphanage. Wow. That was something I hadn't thought about for a few days. How was I going to go back to Uglich and tell a group of 60 kids and 15 staff that someone they knew and loved was dead.

God, Phil, and I kept on talking clearing things up. It was really comforting talking to God. Phil explained to God what the hospital was like. At one point he was talking about the equipment in Alan's room. He was fire. He couldn't understand why Pat was not satisfied. "God, you see this place" he said, "they have everything there. He is constantly on oxygen. There is a respirator and all sorts of other fancy equipment around. God, you yourself would be impressed. They even have one of those things that go beep, beep, beep."

"An EKG" God Interjected.

"Yeah, one of those things," Phil said. "You would really be impressed."

"That's great," said God.

I was in tears laughing. I never saw anyone get so excited and pumped up over equipment that was in a hospital. But there was Phil, going on and on, not even stopping to take a breath. All of a sudden he handed me the phone. I calmed myself down and took the phone.

"You know, Eric," God said, "he should really be at the European Medical Center. It is the best of the best."

"Yeah, but they want \$1000 a day. Alan can't afford that. After 5 days he would be on the street."

"It's not your responsibility," said God.

"But it is our responsibility. If we take him there and he doesn't wake up in 5 days or less or before his money runs out, than he will be kicked out on the street and it will be our fault. If he will not wake up for twelve days, we can stretch his money out. You heard Phil. The place he is at is not bad, despite what Pat the little miss know it all thinks."

"Well, guys, you are doing a great job," she said.

I hung up and I called around some more. Somewhere, out of nowhere, we found a doctor. It was a European Doctor, but we didn't care. We had spent four hours on the phone and this guy was going whether Pat or Alan's liked it. Finding an American doctor was out of the question. And European doctors are just as good if not better than American. We were taking the deal. They wanted \$100. We agreed. They said the doctor was on his way.

We moved our stuff down to the Minsk hotel. It was a ten-minute walk down Tverskaya. It was a lot cleaner than the Intourist. The lady at the front desk was nice. We could make phone calls from our room and then pay later. It was only \$25 compared to \$100 that the Intourist charged. We contemplated going to a hotel room that Peace Corps provided to volunteers that come to Moscow without charge, but that would have involved a 30-minute trip from the center and it would have made the trip to the hospital over an hour. The hospital was at Ugo-Zapadnaya all the way down at the bottom of the red line on the metro.

I got settled in, took an hour-long nap, and reluctantly got up. It was my turn to go visit Alan. Tanya met me, and we left. We, like Pat did so many times before us, took a taxi. But we didn't order it. We decided to save money and get it on the street. But, getting a receipt was impossible. This would prove to be a problem later.

After searching for the hospital a bit, we finally found it. Our driver dropped us off, and we paid him. We went into the hospital, left our bags at the front desk, and went upstairs to see Alan. We rang the special doorbell to the room and were let in immediately. It was a pretty big change in doctor mentality, from the days before in Uglich.

The first thing I was told was that Alan had woken up. "That's great. It's almost all over," I said.

I saw Alan. He lay in a bed, had quite a few IV's stuck in him, and was receiving oxygen. He looked pathetic. He had pretty nasty bruises all over his shoulders. They were the most visible forms of pain to his body. Who knew what was going on inside his body? Then again, who knew what was going on in his head?

I tried to talk to Alan. All he could do was barely open his mouth. He tried to push a few words out, but they were so inaudible that I had no idea what he was saying. I think what he said had something to do with wanting out of there. I told him I was glad he was awake and then went to talk to the doctors.

With Tanya's help, the doctors and I communicated. They said he was doing fine. He had pneumonia, but should wake up in a few days. I reiterated what Phil had said; that we are the one's in charge of Alan, not Pat. We were the ones in contact with the parents.

I told them that we were working on getting him declared mentally incompetent so we can have kicked out of the country. They agreed that what we wanted to do was best, but that they couldn't do anything. Only a psychologist could. Also, only a psychologist could hold him in the hospital against his will. There was a psychologist two levels up that came down every day to look at him. Apparently he was 100% against Alan leaving the hospital anytime soon. I wrote a letter to him saying that I gave him permission to do whatever he felt was best.

The European doctor had been there and didn't really have much more to add. I asked to borrow their phone and call him myself. He affirmed that everything was being done that could be. He said that maybe he should be moved to someplace where he could be better treated for Pneumonia. I said we couldn't afford it. "Well, then leave him where he is, he's fine." I hoped that comment would make Alan's parents happy. I hoped that it would make Pat happy.

I went to talk to Pat. She wasn't happy. She was one step ahead of us. She was really scared that Alan might be declared mentally incompetent. "Why?" I asked, "it would be for his benefit. He would receive the care he required."

She disagreed.

"The reason I don't know what to do," she said, "was because Alan's wife in America called and asked that he be removed from the hospital immediately."

"I didn't know Alan had a wife," I said

"Neither did I," said Pat.

“Where did she call to?”  
“Here at the hospital.”  
“Where did she get number?”  
“I don’t know.”  
“Who did she talk to?”  
“Me.”

I left it at that. That was very strange. At least it was good that he woke up.

I called Phil and told him that Alan had woken up. I told him what the doctors had said, what the psychologist thought, and what the European doctor we ordered had said. I told him about Alan’s wife. I asked him to call Alan’s parents and inquire about her. “Furthermore,” I said, “ask why this person, his wife, is now barking orders after being silent for so long. I asked Phil if there was anything else that needed to be done. “Yes,” he said, “Make sure we get a thank you.”

Pat wanted Tanya to translate a few things to the doctors. She told the doctors that when Alan is strong enough, he would become very violent. He would rip the IV’s out of his arms and try to leave. He would do anything possible to get out of the hospital. She had seen it before and it was bound to happen again.

Just then we heard a crash behind us. Alan had gotten up enough energy to get one leg off the hospital bed. In doing so, he knocked over his IV stand.

We ran in. The doctors were right behind us. They stood the IV upright and got him all settled in again. I guess he was quickly gaining his strength back.

We tried to talk to him some more. It was meaningless conversation. “We are glad you woke up. We thought that we were going to lose you. What an adventure it’s been.” He never really had a response.

Pat mentioned that she would be leaving on Monday.  
“No,” Alan said incredibly faintly, “You leave next Monday.”  
“No,” Pat said, “You have been unconscious for a week. I leave in two days.”  
He tried to argue. It was pointless. He really had no idea that he had been unconscious for six days.

It was about time for us to leave. But, there was last thing I needed to do.  
“Alan,” I said, “Phil and I would like to here you say, ‘Thank You.’”  
“For what?” he said. I didn’t say anything more.

Tanya, Sarah, Pat, and I caught another gypsy cab back to our respective hotels. I went to Phil’ room to find out what he found out about Alan’s wife.

“He doesn’t have a wife,” He told me. “Pat made it up.”

We went out to celebrate Alan’s waking up. We went without Pat.

#### Day 7 – Sunday March 4th

We were finally going to be able to sleep in. We did.  
We wanted to forget about Alan for a day. We did.  
We wanted to ditch Pat. We did.  
We wanted to relax. We did.  
We wanted a day where we not would have to even mention Alan’s name. We were dreaming.

We were invited to a grand opening celebration of and Internet Café in one of the most prestigious malls in Moscow, located right next to the Kremlin. The cafe was being built by David Tagliani, a man highly

involved in the Uglich Orphanage. For the grand opening he invited the director of the orphanage and a bunch of orphans to witness the spectacle.

There was no spectacle. Just a toast to David and free Internet Access for a few hours. We decided to take advantage of it. We sat down at computers and checked our e-mail. After about 15 minutes, Phil called me over to his computer. He was mad.

I sat down and looked at the computer screen. In front of me was an e-mail from Alan's parents. Now that Alan had woken up, they decided to change their stance from, "Do what you think is best," to "this is what you are going to do."

We decided to respond. We were furious about the fact that they would be so relaxed through the whole ordeal and upon recovery, they felt at the liberty to start barking orders at us and telling us what to do.

"This is your son," we wrote back, "he was about to die and you didn't care. He recovered thanks to the fact that we ran around like chickens with our heads cut off. That's something everyone else was reluctant to do. Now you are telling us that we have to take orders from you. We are missing work. We have people upset with us in Uglich because we are not there. We don't care to be here. Why don't you come over and take care of your own son! We are not your servants!"

The director of the orphanage pulled me aside. She wanted to know what was happening with Alan. I told her he was fine. She asked a thousand questions. I refused to answer them since I myself didn't know what the outcome would be. I couldn't speculate.

She expressed her opinion about Alan. "I do not want him at the orphanage anymore," she said, "It is not good for the children to see this guy crack all the time. We cannot afford to have him there. He does strange things. He attempts suicide. This is his fourth attempt in two years in Uglich. People worry about him. It's not fair. Last year we spent days and nights looking for him. He wound up in the hospital, but the next day he woke up. I went to visit him and he picked up a chair and through it at me. I don't want him around the children. He is dangerous."

Although I agreed, all I said was, "I understand your position Tatiana Safarovna."

"I am going to go to the police," she said. "If he comes anywhere near the kids, I will have him arrested," she said.

I went back to Phil. He had been in front of the computer for a good 45 minutes typing a response to Alan's parents. I sat down and read his e-mail. "Whoa. Hang on a second here, man. You can't be saying all those things," I said. He really wanted to tear into them. We spent another twenty minutes making corrections to make it sound a little more eloquent. It was still incredibly harsh. At the bottom we wrote my parents address down and asked his parents to send my parents a check for \$1800 to cover the ambulance. Later we learned that 30-year-old Alan depends on his parents.

We finalized everything and were ready to send it. We couldn't. The period of free Internet was over. It had ended two minutes earlier. We went to ask the lady at the front desk to just give us one more minute to send out e-mail. "Okay," she said, and rebooted the machine. Everything was lost. Everything. The e-mail never got sent.

Phil went irate. He grabbed his coat and stormed out of the café. I had no idea where he was going, but I grabbed Tanya and went after him. I had run to catch up with him but I had lost him. It took another ten minutes to find him.

"It's probably better that Alan's parents aren't here right now. Phil would beat them into the ground," I thought.



After the celebration, David took all the kids to go bowling. We went with them. Tanya had to go home, so I said goodbye and she left.

We got to the bowling alley and tried to relax. It was pointless. It was now 10:00 PM. I had to call Pat. She was leaving the next day for America. Not speaking a word of Russian, she was sure to need help. I was more than willing to give it to her. Anything to get her out of the country.

I called her at her hotel room. Her voice sounded very strange. She was talking very slowly. Very slowly. She had one to two second pauses between each word. She could not think straight or coherently. She was a wreck. She probably took a lot of Welburtin like Alan, and we knew what that could lead to. I was more than happy to help her get out of the country.

After about a 45-minute conversation, in which very little was said since most of it was waiting for Pat to complete a thought, I hung up. I went to tell Phil what we talked about.

"I agreed that we would meet her at 9:00 in the morning and take her to the Airport," I said.

"I'm not going," he said.

"Fine," I said. I more or less expected that response.

I told Phil everything else that occurred in the conversation. She was worried Alan would be declared mentally incompetent and this was not good. 'Just trust me.' She didn't like facility he was in. 'Just trust me.' She had experience with hospitals and knew what was best for Alan. "Just trust me." She had been through this before with him. 'Just trust me.' He would go crazy if he stayed there a long time. 'Just trust me.' He needed to leave. 'Just trust me.' The place he was in was not a good place for him. 'Just trust me.' He wanted out and had told her.

I told Phil my responses to everything she said. "If he was declared mentally incompetent it would be for the better. He would receive help. No, Pat you don't know what is best for Alan. I understand you have been through this before with Alan, but he has never been unconscious this long before. You need to trust the doctors. Nobody else. That's whom I trust. Alan has Pneumonia and so he needs to stay for a while. It doesn't matter what he wants. The doctors want what is best for him too. They are not conspiring against him. He just woke up from a coma. He is not all there. Trust the doctors. No, I do not trust anyone but the doctors. They are professionals."

We never got a chance to bowl. We played a few video games, but that was it. The place was closing down. We waited for David and left with him.

On the way out he explained his position about Alan. "Last year when I was in somewhat the same situation as you, I spent a lot of time on the phone with Pat as well. I didn't know who she was or why I was talking to her instead of his parents. But, that was the way it was. She was in America, and I was here with Alan. It was not something I cared to deal with, but luckily he survived. That only lasted a few days, nothing compared to what you guys are dealing with. I feel sorry for you."

"But how do you act around him when you see him?"

"I don't do anything. I don't do favors for him. I don't go out my way to hurt him. I don't even talk to him. I don't talk to anyone about him. I don't say any good things about him. I don't say any bad things about him. I just keep my mouth shut. I don't say anything."

"What about Pat?"

"When all was said and done last year, I got an e-mail from her. All it said was, 'Fuck You.' I didn't respond."

We said goodbye to David and went back to the hotel.

## Day 8 – Monday March 5th

I got up at 8:45. I had to meet Pat and take her to the Airport. I made the walk down to her \$100 a night hotel and went up to her room. She wasn't there. I finally found her downstairs loading her bags. She was incredibly relieved to see me. She now had a translator. Not a very good one, but it was better than nothing.

"Where's Phil?" asked Pat.

"He's not coming," I said.

"I thought he would want to say goodbye." I didn't respond.

We loaded her seven bags into the car that she had pre-ordered. She was able to do that much because a lot of the staff spoke English. That is why the Intourist was able to charge \$100 a night while its neighbors charged \$25.

We made the hour long drive to the airport. I was in good spirits. Pat was almost gone. I decided to make conversation.

We talked about Sarah and how she is taught. We discussed whether she really ever realized she was in a foreign country or just a bad part of America. It was very interesting. I felt bad for Sarah. She loved churches, came all the way to Russia, and didn't get to see any. She never went to Kremlin in Uglich. She never even got to walk by it. Pat always wanted to take Taxis. She never saw the Kremlin in Moscow and her hotel was a two-minute walk from it. It was shame.

I was genuinely curious about depression and what the deal with it was. I asked Pat. She described it as a constant sinking feeling. She explained how the drugs work and what they do for the body. She explained why people stop taking the drugs. She was an expert. She was on a few different anti-depressants herself.

I asked if this was the worst of Alan's attempts. "No," she said rather casually, "I think the time he slit his wrists was the worst."

Eventually, we got to the Airport and went to check the status of the plane. It was late. It was supposed to leave at 1:00 PM, but it was delayed until 5:00. We had time to kill. Pat sat down and started writing thank you letters. She wrote one to Olga, one to Anna, and one to Katya. She even wrote one to Phil, but all she really said was "I hope someday you can trust me." I couldn't wait to show Phil that letter. Not only was the comment stupid, but her hand writing was pathetic. It was as if a 90-year-old lady had written it. The letters were incredibly shaky and barely legible.

I decided to take her down to storage so that she could check her stuff in while she waited. I was going to go back to Moscow. I pointed out where she could eat and appropriate prices to pay. I told her how to get her stuff out of storage. But, then she decided that the best thing to do would be to go all the way back into Moscow and go eat at Patio Pizza. She knew that place and she was comfortable there. I couldn't believe it. This was to be the fourth or fifth time she ate. It was right next to the hotel. She didn't go anywhere else. I wondered if she would give me some of the money she was wasting, but I didn't ask.

We ordered a taxi and went all the way back into Moscow. When we got to the hotel I called Phil. I told him that she didn't leave. He wasn't happy. I told him to meet us at Patio Pizza, the only place Pat ever ate.

We all sat down and talked to Alan about some more. Things were starting to get repeated. A couple hours passed and it was time to go. We walked back to the hotel and ordered another Taxi. I wrote on a piece of paper in Russian, "Please tell me where the storage area is located." All she would have to do is hand it to someone and they would help her. She knew where to check on arrival and departure times of her plane. I had shown her. She knew where to check-in. She knew where to go to enter the terminal. My presence

wouldn't have mattered anymore. Once she walked into the terminal, I couldn't do anything more. Everything was laid out for her.

We said goodbye to Pat and she left. We were happy. She was gone. We wouldn't have to deal with her ever again.

We went back to our hotel to call and check on Alan. He was fine. We told the doctors that we would be there tomorrow.

We went out to celebrate. We treated ourselves to dinner at an Indian restaurant in Moscow. It was worth it.

### Day 9 – Tuesday March 6<sup>th</sup>

We got up late. We didn't have to terribly much to accomplish. Pat was gone. We didn't have to worry about her anymore.

We wanted to go home, but we had a few more things to take care of. We needed to talk to Alan and see how he was doing. We needed to know his plans about returning to Uglich. We needed to prevent that from happening if possible for our sake as well as the kids' sake. And, we couldn't leave Moscow until we knew exactly what was going to happen to him. We were the communicating link between his parents and him. We didn't have a choice; we had to stay in Moscow. There wasn't much to do. We were bored, but we had to stay.

Furthermore, we wanted to give Alan's ATM card back. Phil was the one carrying it around, but he understood full well, that I did not want that back in Alan's hands until my parents gave me confirmation that they had received an \$1800 check from his parents to cover the cost of the ambulance.

Meanwhile, we continually pulled out the \$300 a day maximum off of his ATM card to cover costs. Things were really starting to get expensive. Phil and I both had phone bills in Uglich to cover. There were a lot of long distance phone calls made, not only to Moscow but also to America. There was the charge of \$300 to the hospital. There was \$100 for the "American" doctor that the parents insisted go see Alan. There was Taxi rides. There was food. There were lots of things. We went through a big headache to save him money. We hoped he would appreciate it.

We visited the Peace Corps office in the morning. They wanted to know more details, so we agreed to come back the next day.

In the early afternoon we went to visit Alan. We were let right in. We were told he still had a serious Pneumonia problem and we went his bedside to talk to him.

"How are you, Alan," We asked

"Okay," his voice was incredibly hoarse. But, it was better than it was a few days earlier.

"Well, that's good Alan."

"Yeah, I guess. I don't want to be here. Can you get me out of here."

"No Alan, you are sick," We said.

"But, I don't want to be here. I wasn't trying to commit suicide. I was trying to escape."

"The doctors want you here."

"I don't care. You don't understand. I am mentally unstable. I will go crazy if I stay here too long."

"We understand Alan," we said.

"You have to help me."

"We will talk to the doctors and see what they say. But, we will do what they say."

"Okay, but get me out of here."

Phil took over. We had talked about this earlier. Phil was going to do most of talking. I didn't care to say too much. And I already said what I wanted to. Phil knew my opinion, and he was going to voice it.

“Alan, how long do you think it will take to recover from Pneumonia,” Phil said.

“It doesn’t matter. I will leave before then,” Alan said.

“Where are you going to go.”

“Back to Uglich.”

“Why?”

“Because that it where I work.”

“Do you think that is best for your health?”

“I don’t care. I want to see the kids. I have a program to run.”

“But, do the kids want to see you?”

“Yes.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Have you asked them?”

There was silence. He was starting to figure things out. We were part of the conspiracy also. It was all one large plot to hurt Alan.

“Alan,” Phil said, “You are not mentally stable. You said it yourself. Do you think it is good that a mentally unstable person is working around kids.”

“The kids need me.”

“Do you think it is good that the kids see you like this? What do you think the rumors are that are generating there right now.”

“The kids love me.”

“Do you think that you would be able to work around kids in America.”

“Why not?”

“You don’t think that some government agency would step in.”

“You are probably right.”

“Yeah, I am right.”

Silence. Alan started to cry.

“I didn’t ask for your help,” Alan said.

“Well you got it. You should be thankful.”

“I’m not.”

I interjected. “Do you know how long the human body can last without water.”

Silence.

“Three days, Alan,” I said, “Three days. You were in a coma for 4 days and unconscious for 2. How would you have gotten water? You would have been dead after three days. Three days, Alan. You’d better be thankful Pat was there. You’d better be thankful we were there.”

“I didn’t ask for your help,” Alan said.

Phil took over again.

“I don’t think that was a very nice way to treat Pat,” he said, “She was very scared. I thought she was your friend,” he said.

“Fuck you,” said Alan, “I didn’t ask for your help.”

“You don’t want to live?”

Silence.

“Why did you do it, Alan?”

“Tatiana Safarovna made me do it.”

“The director of the orphanage?”  
“Yes, she drove me to this.”  
“So it’s here fault?” Phil asked  
“Yes.”  
“Is it Tatiana Safarovna’s fault that you took the pills?”  
“Yes.”  
“Did she put them in your mouth?”

He cried some more.

“I wasn’t trying to commit suicide,” he said.  
“You weren’t?”  
“No.”  
“Then what happened?”  
“I was just trying to escape.”  
“Escape?”  
“Yes, Tatiana Safarovna made me do it.”  
“What do you mean by escape, Alan?”

He thought. Then he thought some more.

“Do you guys drink?” he asked. He never drank. Never smoked. He only took pills.  
“Yeah, we have a few beers every now and again, Alan. Why?”  
“Well it’s the same thing.”  
“What is?”  
“You are trying to escape,” said Phil.  
“I don’t drink myself into a coma, Alan!” responded Phil agitated.  
“It’s the same thing.”  
“No it’s not!”

Alan was passing the blame. It was Tatiana Safarovna’s fault. He didn’t care about the kids if he subjected them to his presence. If he really cared, he would not go back to Uglich. He was comparing attempting suicide to drinking beer. He said he was trying to escape. He was swearing at us. He had pneumonia and was indifferent. He didn’t care about his life. I needed to leave.

I walked out into the main corridor and looked down the hallway. There sat a nurse. She was staring wild-eyed at a television screen in front of her. I went to join her. I looked at the screen. It was a surveillance camera. I could see Alan laying in bed and Phil yelling at him. There were arms flying everywhere. Phil was pacing back and forth. There was no sound coming from the television, but I didn’t need it. I could here Phil yelling down the hall perfectly well.

The nurse wanted to know what the fight was about. She didn’t object to it. None of the doctors did. We trusted them. They trusted us. The only supervision we had was this tiny little surveillance camera halfway down the hall. They knew we were trying to help Alan.

“He wants to go back to Uglich,” I told the nurse.  
“Why?”  
“I don’t know,” I said.  
“He really should not go back,” she said.  
“I know, but he wants to. We want him kicked out of the country for everyone’s sake.”  
“I understand,” she said, “Can’t the American Government do something.”  
“The US Embassy is doing what they can. But, apparently, if he wants to leave the hospital and go back to Uglich, he can.”  
“That’s strange,” she said.

We watched the escapade on TV some more. It was actually quite entertaining. And then, out of nowhere, Phil came storming out of the room. He walked down to us. We stared at the TV. Alan sat there with his head buried in his hands.

We went to talk to other nurses and doctors and explained to them what was going on. While we were in there, Alan again tried to leave. Nurses had to run in there and hold him down. It was crazy, but he wanted to leave. He wasn't thinking. Where would he go? He had no money. He had a few clothes, but he had no idea where they were. The puke covered clothes he was wearing a week ago were in Phil's closet in Uglich. If he found the few things that Pat brought from his apartment, he would be all right, but he didn't know where they were.

A nurse asked me to help her wheel him down to another room. It was a room with more patients. I don't know why they moved him all around. They probably figured that if fireworks are going to fly he should be in a separate room. They must have known that fireworks would fly long before we arrived. They really were intelligent people.

We got another update from the head doctor. His pneumonia was improving. Alan was not talking to the doctors. There probably wasn't much to talk about. The psychiatrist had come down, looked at Alan, and had not changed his mind. He needed help. "But, they reiterated, "If he gets strong enough, he can leave. The US embassy better do something quick if they want him gone."

With that we left.

We went to check e-mail to see if my parents had received a check from Alan's parents. There was nothing.

There was nothing more we could really do about Alan. The embassy told us there was nothing they could do. What happened, happened.

We moved our stuff to the Peace Corps hotel room at the other end of Moscow. We had nothing more to say to Alan. We wanted to go back to Uglich.

#### Day 10 – Wednesday March 7<sup>th</sup>

In the early morning we went to the Peace Corps office. We talked to everybody. Our program manager, our Peace Corps Director, God, and many other people.

The Peace Corps director wanted us back in Uglich and we assured him that we did not want to get tangled up in this whole mess in the first place. We would go back as soon as possible.

I called the ambulance service and talked to Dima. He wanted more money since the ambulance had been delayed in Uglich. He wanted to charge my credit card, to which I objected. I gave him Alan's parents phone number in America and told him to collect from them.

We called the hospital to tell them we were coming. They said it was too late in the day and that we should come back tomorrow. Instead we decided to go to a movie. I called Tanya and told her our plan. We went to a movie theater and watched a movie called Family Man. "How fitting," I thought, "Welcome to the happy little world of America."

#### Day 11 – Thursday March 8<sup>th</sup>

We had very little to do. It was nice. Things were slowly getting back to normal.

The first thing I did in the morning was call the hospital to tell them we would be there in the afternoon.

“Why?” the man at the other end asked.

“To see Alan,” I said.

“He left last night.”

“What?”

“He left. A woman came here and released him.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know.”

That pretty much settled that. We didn’t need to go to the hospital. He wasn’t there.

It was quite obvious what happened. Pat released him. She had never left.

We went down to the local Telegraph office and made a long distance phone call to my parents in America. They told me they received the check for \$1800 and put it in my bank account. I didn’t even bother to explain that the guy whose life we tried to save was gone. He wasn’t dead, just gone.

Everything was taken care of. We just needed to buy our train tickets and go back to Uglich. Then it hit us. There are only two trains to Uglich a week. If he weren’t in the hospital, he would probably be on his way back to Uglich. He would be on the same train as us.

March 8<sup>th</sup> is a huge holiday in Russia. It is woman’s day. I took Tanya out for a nice dinner and enjoyed a nice relaxing evening. However, I couldn’t help but think about Alan.

“You know,” I said, “It feels like this is almost over. But for some reason, I don’t think it is even close to being over. For me it will linger. Is this how life works? You bust your tail to save someone’s life, you never really get a thank you, and when all is said and done, life goes on like it always did. Nothing changes. Everything you did is forgotten and disregarded. Nothing comes of it. The crazy people still bother others. The innocent are damaged because of it. And nothing is done about it.”

“You tried your best, Eric,” said Tanya, “Forget about it. At least for tonight.”

I took her advice. I was tired. I wanted to forget about Alan. And I did for while. Everything was fine until Tanya pointed to something on the menu and said, “Try this. It’s good. Just trust me.”

I hope I never hear anyone say, “Just trust me,” ever again.

#### Day 12 – Friday March 9<sup>th</sup>

We didn’t have anything to do all day.

In the evening we went and bought our tickets, got dinner, and planned what we were going to say if we saw Alan on the train. But, in all honesty, we had absolutely nothing to say. At 11:00 PM we boarded the train. And indeed, Alan was there. He was not in our particular compartment. He was a few doors down. That was good for both him and us. We didn’t have to deal with each other.

We waited a bit and then went down to his compartment.

“Hi Alan,” We said.

“Hi.”

“You left.”

“Yes.”

“How’s Pat?”

“Fine.”

“She’s the one who helped you leave.”

“Yes.”

“How is your Pneumonia?”

“I still have it.”

“What are going to do about it.”

“Nothing.”

“Okay,” we said, a bit too relaxed. We were finished. There was nothing we could say or do. We decided to go back to our compartment.

The train was to arrive in Uglich at 5:30 in the morning.

### Day 13 – Saturday March 10<sup>th</sup>

Early in the morning we arrived in Uglich. I don't know what happened to Alan, but we didn't see him getting of the train.

We went our separate ways. I was home at last. Alone.

In the evening we sat down to explain to Tatiana Safarovna what was going on. “Alan woke up on Saturday,” we said. “He has Pneumonia. Pat released him from the hospital. Last night we got on the train. We saw him on it. He is back in Uglich.”

“He's here?” she asked in amazement.

“He's here,” we said, “He's back in Uglich.”

She told us that she had talked to the police. “If he comes anywhere near the kids, he will be arrested,” she said.

We left and went to tell our friends the escapade we had been through for the past 13 days. Little did we know, things would last for a while.

### Wednesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>

Phil and I were eating at a local restaurant with friends. I needed to make a phone call. The restaurant we were at wouldn't let me. I decided to run over to the Internet café attached to the orphanage. I made my call.

When I hung up, an orphan came up to me and told me that Alan was in the orphanage. “Does Tatiana Safarovna know,” I asked. “I don't know,” she said.

Just then Tatiana Safarovna came walking through the door. She was in a great mood. I couldn't believe it. It didn't take me too long to figure out why. She had been drinking. I told her about Alan. She didn't care. “One time won't kill anyone,” she said.

I went and told Phil that Alan was in the orphanage. He ran out the door. I wasn't exactly sure what he was doing. “Maybe he went to beat him up,” I thought, “This time I am not going to chase him down.”

Five minutes later he was back. “We're done,” he said.

“What do you mean,” I said.

“Alan has his ATM card back. We are done.”

“What did you say to him.”

“Not a word. I handed him his ATM card, turned around and left.”

### Thursday, March 15<sup>th</sup>



The Peace Corps medical staff came to Uglich. The purpose of their visit was pretty much to clear Peace Corps' name and make sure that they knew that Alan had nothing to do with Peace Corps. They wanted to make sure that if something happened to a Peace Corps volunteer in Uglich, he/she would still be taken care of. The mission was accomplished.

#### Wednesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>

I was in Moscow. I was just about to come back from a Peace Conference. I was scheduled to leave for another one on Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> that was being held in Rostov on the Don.

I got a phone call from Phil.

"Alan showed up at my door," he said. "He demanded money back. Apparently we spent too much when we saved his life."

"How did he find out where you live?" I asked.

"Olga showed him. She was with him"

"What! That's crazy. What is she doing hanging out with that guy?"

"I don't know. But he wanted his puke covered clothes back."

"I can't believe you haven't thrown that stuff away!"

"He also wanted money back immediately. He said that if we didn't give \$1000 back immediately we would have a problem. He said his parents would get us in trouble."

"His parents?" I said.

"Yeah, he can't do anything without his parents," Phil said, "30-year-old Alan needs his umbilical cord."

"I don't know what to say."

"I don't either. I don't feel safe with that lunatic around. He knows where my parents live in America. He lives 30 minutes away from them. He knows where I live in Uglich. He is showing up at my door threatening me. I don't feel safe."

"Call Peace Corps," I said.

"I already did. They told me to go to the Police. I am going tomorrow."

"Good."

"Yeah, real good. This sucks."

"I will be there tomorrow evening. Talk to you then."

"Okay. Bye."

I did not know what to think. How was I supposed to get to sleep? Things were horrible.

#### Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>

I pulled into Uglich in the evening and went to meet Phil and our friend Kolya at a local bar. Phil filled me in on everything.

"Relax Eric, sit down, we have a lot to talk about" he said, "this is a crazy country. I went to talk to the police they were very nice. They know Alan. They don't really care for Alan. They asked about the threats. I told them. They know Alan and I live real close to each other in America. They know I am scared."

"So they are on our side," I said.

"More or less."

"Good."

"Well, after we got through talking about all the Alan stuff, they asked me questions that you wouldn't believe," Phil said.

"What?"

"They asked why Kolya and Anna are going to break up. They know our personal conversations, man!"

"How do they know them?"

"They are following us or something."

"That's not good."

“Not good at all!”

“They then pulled out pictures and asked what I knew about different Chechnayans. Chechnayans that we hang out with,” he said.

“Are they involved in crime or something?” I asked.

“I doubt it. You know the people here are racist against Chechnayans,” he said.

“I don’t like the fact they know our conversations.” I said.

“They know our conversations. They want to know about people we hang out with. Who knows what else?”

“What do we do now?”

“I don’t know, but tomorrow at 11:00 AM you are going to talk to them.”

“Do I have to?”

“Yes. You don’t have a choice. The appointment is already scheduled.”

### Friday April 13<sup>th</sup>

I got up at 9:00 and checked my e-mail. I received three threats. One accusing me of extortion from Pat. The second accusing me of being drunk in front of orphans from Pat. I hadn’t been in Uglich for a week and a half. It was impossible. And a third from Alan’s parents threatening a lawsuit. We had spent too much money when we saved Alan’s life.

I left my apartment at 10:00. Anna had agreed to translate. Kolya wouldn’t. He was scared. Nobody wanted anything to do with the Police. Russians generally avoid the police at all costs. A Russian will tell you the less you can deal with the police, the better. It was amazing that Anna agreed to translate for me.

We got to the Police station in plenty of time and went in. The police were very nice. They were joking and laughing. They asked formalities, then they got down to business.

“Have you received any threats?”

“I received two this morning.”

“What were they,” they asked.

“Nothing much. Alan’s parents are threatening a lawsuit.”

“How did you receive them?”

“By e-mail.”

The phone rang. I had a phone call. It was Phil.

“What time does the bus leave to Yaroslavl tonight?” he asked.

“You called me at the police station to ask me that?”

“So?”

“I am in the middle of an interview.”

“Are you going to tell me or not. I need to know.”

“5:15,” I said and hung up.

I told the police what the call was about. We all had a good laugh.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“Not really.”

“Okay,” I said.

“Do you have any questions?” they asked.

“Yes,” I said, “Did Tatiana Safarovna file a restraining order against Alan?”

“No.”

“She told me she did.”

“Those things don’t exist in Russia,” they said.

“Are you going to interview Alan,” I asked.

“We already did.”

“Okay. Just curious.”  
“He told us you and Phil are spies.”  
“Really?”  
“Yes.”  
“Are you?”  
“No.”  
“Okay.”

That was funny. After a few more questions, it was over. The meeting wasn't anything too special. The cops were really on our side. They just wanted to get a report down in case something happened to me. In case I disappeared or something.

I ran home and packed up my stuff for the conference. I had to meet everyone that was going in Yaroslavl that night. I was leaving for my conference the next day.

I only ever saw Alan once more.

April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001

An article titled Manyak Vospitatel (Crazy teacher) came out in the newspaper Peramenka Unisty. The paper was located in Yaroslavl, the capitol of the Oblast (Region). This article was the biggest of numerous articles that had come out. It took a half page.

The article talked about Alan Hindman, gave details of his attempted suicide, his previous attempts, how he wound up working in Russia, and what exactly his program in Russia was all about. It criticized the organization that brought him over the very first time, despite the fact that they made him get a thorough medical check. Subsequent times he returned on his own.

Conspiracy theories erupted as to who wrote the article despite the fact it was quite obvious. But, the obvious are never accused.

Tuesday March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001

The threat of a lawsuit continued via e-mail. We had spent \$1800 to save Alan's life. This was too much. This was despite the fact that \$1800 would only last a day or two in the states. This was also despite the fact that we were trying to save him money during the whole episode. This is why we spent hours on the phone trying to find cheap ambulances. This is why we turned ambulances around. This is why we spent hours trying to find a doctor that was not only cheap but also met the parents requirements. This is why we did not take him to the hospitals that he should have gone to.

But, it doesn't matter. We knew all along, that Alan's parents had put a price on their son's life. We just didn't know how much.

The threat of a lawsuit was a slap in the face. It made our efforts look like nothing. I lost a lot of respect for a lot of people.

Tuesday April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001

In the early afternoon I was walking home from the orphanage. I saw Alan talking to an orphan. He was right in front of me and I was walking toward him. I got closer and closer. I actually wanted to talk to him. When he saw me, he immediately walked the other direction. I never caught up to him. It was the last time I ever saw him.

Wednesday April 25, 2001

Peace Corps arrived in the early afternoon. They were going to help Phil move. He was switching cities. The reason was safety. They suggested moving me too. But, I had so little time in Uglich that I elected to stay in Uglich instead of switching.

I did not want to deal with Alan at all. I did not want to see him wandering the streets. I did not want to know about his interactions with kids. I had projects in progress at the orphanage. But, it was only a matter of time before my Peace Corps service would end. It was not worth the hassle of moving.

Friday May 25<sup>th</sup>

I was at the train station in Yaroslavl. I was going to meet the orphanage to go buy sewing equipment for the project I was working on.

I saw Olga standing waiting for a bus. Actually, she saw me and made it quite clear that she wanted me to talk to her. Although there were problems between her and Phil, I had nothing against her. I went to talk to her.

“What are you doing here in Yaroslavl, Olga?” I asked.

“Getting money from my bank.”

“Really, how have you been?”

“Not too bad.”

“I thought you were maybe here for the holiday tomorrow.”

“No, I just came to get money. How are you?”

“Doing well.”

She was in a great mood and very talkative. It seemed like the Alan escapade had not phased her.

“How is Alan doing?” I asked? I knew they were good friends.

“He is doing well. I talk to him everyday by e-mail.”

“Really, where is he?”

“He is in Bulgaria.”

“Is he coming back to Russia?”

“Yes, he should be here in another couple of months.”

“Where are you living?”

“At his apartment.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Olga, I am concerned about you. Please don’t get mixed up with him. He is going to hurt you.”

“I understand,” was all she said.

“What does Alan say about us,” I asked

Silence.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to answer.”

“I stay away from it all. I know you guys only wanted to help Alan,” she said.

“Thanks Olga.”

Her bus was coming. She had to go.

“I wish you well, Eric.”

“Thanks.”

“Will you call me sometime.”

“Okay,” I said. I had Alan’s phone number, but I had no real intention of calling her.

“See you later.”

“Bye Olga.”

“Poor girl,” I thought, “Although it looks strange, I know what Olga is doing. She is using Alan’s apartment for free while he is gone. That’s it. She studies English at the pedagogical institute. She hangs around Alan to sharpen her English skills. She is a smart girl. She’ll be all right.”

May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001

Alan’s parents requested a list of how money was spent. We e-mailed it to them.

\$600 food, hotels, expenses, taxi fares

\$300 went to the hospital as a deposit for Alan’s stay (\$200 came from cash Pat had on hand).

\$60 for the first cab in Moscow early in the morning.

\$100 for the consultation fee for the Doctor from European Union.

\$30 for Phil’ phone bill in Uglich

\$40 other transportation

\$100 for Eric’s phone bill in Uglich

\$30 for hotel phone calls in Moscow

\$10 for a train ticket back to Uglich

\$10 to help with cab fare from Moscow to Uglich.

We owed Alan \$370 for phone bills that we overestimated. We pulled the money out ahead of time because we weren’t going to come beg for it later.

We owed Alan \$150, for money that we could not account for. There were a lot of little things, but since we didn’t have receipts for everything, we agreed to give it back.

All in all it felt a bit strange. It was as if we were bribing his parents to avoid a lawsuit.

June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001

Alan’s parents received a check for \$560. It was all over.

June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001

In the early afternoon Olga called me. She wanted to meet. My girlfriend was with me and we took Olga out for pizza at the Internet Café attached to the orphanage. I learned a lot, especially about her connections with Alan.

Olga met Alan for the first time three years ago when he came to give a speech at her college. From there, Olga met Alan on an infrequent basis. Things were always kept professional. Nothing more ever occurred between the two.

Olga started helping Alan translate letters between the kids and their sponsors. For this she received a small salary. Every once in a while she would help Alan when he went to the local market to buy clothes and gifts for the kids.

In the three years that Olga knew Alan, she never once saw him have any problems. She had merely heard about a few problems the year before, but that was it. She had no idea that he ever wandered the streets crying, flipped out and banged his head against the wall at the orphanage, cried uncontrollably in front of the children, or even attempted suicide. She never once saw him take a pill. She simply had no idea

anything was wrong with Alan. People probably knew that she was working with Alan, and so for her benefit, she was kept in the dark.

The infamous night that Alan cracked and in which Olga played a fairly integral role, she had no idea what was going on. She had never seen him act the way he did. She and Pat and Tatiana Safarovna had met in the Internet Café earlier in the day and asked for permission to take Katya to St. Petersburg. Tatiana Safarovna refused. Later that evening, Olga attempted to explain what occurred earlier in the day. Alan flipped out and yelled, "I just want to live a normal life and Tatiana Safarovna won't let me!" He picked up a can of hair spray and threw it through the first of a two-pane window. He then went into the kitchen.

Olga followed him to the kitchen and saw him throw a full handful of pills into his mouth. Pills spilled everywhere. She knew that this was destined to lead to a serious problem, but she didn't know what to do. Alan went back to the room that his computer was in, sat down and started to type. Olga tried to talk to him, but it was useless. He wouldn't say a word. His eyes were glazed over and he was in a state of incredible relaxation. He just sat there and typed.

It came time for Olga to meet the taxi that she had ordered. She told Alan she was leaving. He never looked up from his computer. He simply and quietly responded, "Bye Olga." She left knowing full well that something was probably wrong with Alan.

The next day when Olga heard from her mom that I had called and said that Alan was in a coma, she wasn't shocked. She had assumed that something like this could happen. But, she was very scared. She felt deep inside that somehow it was her fault. She never understood how or why this whole problem with Alan could occur, but she felt there was something more that she should have done, or something that she did do that she should have done.

When Alan left, Olga moved out of her dormitory for the college she was studying at, and into his apartment. She continued to receive a small salary for the translations that she was doing for Alan, but now she didn't have to pay for housing. A few months later, she graduated from her college.

She continued to keep in close contact with both Pat and Alan. She e-mailed Pat every other day and Alan on a daily basis.

As I sat eating pizza at the Internet Café with Olga, I realized that there was a lot she did not know or understand, merely by the questions she was asking. She asked why Alan had to take pills, what they did for him, and how they make him feel better. She asked what exactly the pills did, why there can be a chemical imbalance in the brain, and how the pills help to cure that. She asked about electrical impulses in the brain and how that has an effect on people's mood swings. She wondered why someone would stop taking pills if they made him feel better. She asked how close he had been to dead. I told her that I reached a point where I was certain his parents would be soon making funeral arrangements.

Olga knew that Pat had a psychological problem too. Pat had told her that the pills Alan took were hers and that Alan had stolen them. "Why do so many Americans have a problem with depression?" she asked. I told her that I hadn't the slightest idea why. "Maybe it's because," she said, "Russian life is so much harder." That was all she said, but I knew what she was getting at; Russians are too preoccupied with life to worry about things such as depression.

"Olga," I said, "you are a very intelligent young girl. The only thing I really want to tell you is to be very, very careful. Alan will probably hurt you. But, whatever happens, please don't blame yourself. Nothing that occurred was your fault. No way, no how. It was not Pat's fault. It was not even Tatiana Safarovna's fault either. She did not make him take those pills. You did not make him take those pills. He took them himself. Nobody else made him do it. It was definitely NOT your fault."

"Does he hurt other people in Uglich?" she asked.

“Not physically, Olga. He would never physically hurt anybody. All physical pain is directed inward towards himself. But, he will spend a lot of time crying uncontrollably for hours on end. You won’t know what to do. He will wander the streets and you won’t know where he is. He will throw his documents around like he has done before. He will kick walls and bang his head. He will scare kids that don’t understand that he has a psychological problem. He will, in that way, hurt a lot of people. Now do you understand what I mean?”

“I understand, Eric,” she said.

After we had finished talking about Alan, I paid and we went for a walk. I learned that Alan was coming back in August. “He will probably only come for a week,” Olga said. That probably was a direct result of that fact that the Uglich police had said that they would refuse to register him. Legally, he has a three-day grace period in any city before he must register. After three days in Uglich he must move on. Or, he can stay until they come to get him. He is obviously assuming that they will give him a week before they come to get him.

Alan’s sponsorship program still continues, but on a very scaled down level. The kids write letters to America and visa versa with Olga’s help. But, that is it. Alan can’t spend enough time in Uglich to make it a full-blown program.

My girlfriend, Olga, and I walked around for a few more hours looking at souvenirs from Uglich. We stopped to buy ice cream, paintings, and old soviet coins. Eventually we made it to Olga’s apartment. She invited us in for tea and blini, a common Russian food. As we sat and talked, we learned that Pat had written a letter to the US embassy on Olga’s behalf. Pat would like to have Olga visit America for two weeks. Olga would go to Grass Valley, see the sights, and maybe even do a bit of horseback riding.

Olga asked for help. We all sat down at her computer, got on the Internet, and looked to see if we could find any more information to further the process along. Never mind the fact the US embassy knows Pat very well by this point and the chance that they will allow her to write an invitation for Zhenya is close to nil.

June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001

I left Uglich for good.

#### Afterword:

It seems kind of crazy that a lawsuit was being threatened after all we had been through. Nobody really understood the chaos we dealt with, the stress we endured, and the risks we took. I didn’t want to deal with Pat and really did get sick of her comments degrading Russia. Or the fact she felt the liberty to so freely express that opinion despite her ignorance of the country.

It’s a given that life isn’t fair. I don’t expect to be rewarded the slightest for my efforts. A simple, “Thank You,” from Alan would have been enough. That’s all I wanted. Instead I got slapped with the threat of a lawsuit.

I really did think he was going to die. I was glad that he didn’t. And despite all the negative things that resulted, I really am glad that I got to play a role in saving his life. It is not a matter of feeling good or searching for recognition. I simply happy to know that my efforts have given someone a second chance in life.

I was yelled at repeatedly after I would tell my story about Alan to Russians. I heard things like, “You are stupid. You should have let that guy die,” or “what are Americans doing in our country. They just take our money and leave. They shouldn’t be here,” or “you are all crazy. Every single last one of you.”

Once, when my girlfriend told my story to co-workers, they started to complain. When she got sick of them ridiculing me behind my back she stopped them. "Do you think Eric wanted to help this guy," she said. "If you were the only Russian in a strange country and learned of a fellow Russian having trouble, would you not help them out?" That shut them up.

I remember not long after the dust had settled a Russian girl looked me squarely in the eyes and asked, "Are you crazy? What were you thinking? You should have never gotten involved. As soon as you saw him laying on the ground, you should have walked away."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I did that. I wouldn't want that blood on my hands."

"Well next time," she said, "you'll know better."

"I hope some one else finds Alan next time. But, if it is me, I guess I will have to do the whole thing over again."

"You are crazy," she said.

I guess that it would take a bit of living in Russia to realize that I received a compliment more than anything. Russians are mysterious. But, I have learned that I am just as mysterious to them as they are to me. We are two different peoples, struggling to understand each other.

I love Russia. It really is a great country. It is just a completely different way of life; An amazing way of life. The people are kind, sweet, and beautiful. The countryside is breathtaking. The weather is phenomenal in the summer and trying in the winter, but that is one of the beauties of it. The Culture is complex and mysterious. The way of life compels each person that gives it enough time and patience to whisper, "I love Russia."

I've always looked at the Russian people in awe. I don't know why. Maybe it's because I know that no matter what they are forced to endure, they will always survive and emerge as better people because of it. I guess Zhenya was right, Russians are preoccupied with living life. And that is a good thing.