CHAPTER I

REFLECTIONS ON A JOURNEY

Trans-Siberia, Trans-History

Every story begins somewhere. The starting place may seem like an arbitrary choice especially when there are a number of possible departure points. When it is the whole journey that is being described one could begin anywhere for any one point will lead to others. Nonetheless, the selection of where to begin does reveal something about one's priorities. Why are some things remembered more than others? Why do certain themes continue to assert themselves like a tune you cannot get out of your mind? Perhaps there is a deep mystery here or simply the nagging persistence of convictions. Whatever the reason I have chosen to begin in the midst of a specific journey: from Nahodka on the Sea of Japan on the Soviet eastern border to Riga on the Baltic Sea over 6,000 miles to the West.

While traveling across the USSR on the Trans-Siberian Railroad in October 1981, the reflections contained on these pages came into focus. Perhaps that began somewhere between Amazar and Nerchinsk, beyond where the Onon River from Mongolia (on whose bank Genghis Khan was born in 1162) joins the Ingoda to form the Sbika. Perhaps it was somewhere along the mighty Amur, part of whose 2,700 mile passage forms the boundary between China and the USSR. In any case somewhere in this endless expanse of forests and steppes, overwhelmed by the immense scale of Siberia and I was cast into a mood of reflection. I could not help think about those long stretches of human history that like long journeys have shaped individuals and civilizations. Strange, that a land whose name is synonymous with confinement should unleash a flood of reflection that burst the restrictions of place and time.

Ruth and I were then three months into a yearlong sabbatical leave that began with a noisy departure from our home in a small ecumenical community fifty miles north of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. A sign, "Just Married (29 Years)," on the back of the car carried the departing wishes of the ARC Retreat Community which is accustomed to gather to send off guests who come for days of quiet renewal and reflection. We were leaving after five years of intensive activity helping to establish the ARC. During these years, despite its small scale (a community of six to eight and twenty beds for guests) ARC had hosted thousands of guests who sought solitude and healing.

The journey thus far had taken us to the Pacific Northwest and on to California where we discovered that our freighter to Japan had run on to a sand bar forcing us to abandon the original plan of a surface trip around the world. Instead a direct flight to Hong Kong gave us extra time to prepare for a trip to China and after that to Japan. In Yokahama we boarded the Russian ship, "Baikal," and after a 52 hour trip came to Nahodka, USSR. The Trans-Siberian train actually begins its 5,200 mile journey to Moscow in Vladivostok. Foreigners, however, can board the train, "Rossiya", only in Khabarovsk after another overnight train ride of 569 miles from Nahodka. Excited by being in the USSR for the first time, that first night we watched with fascination the passing scenery illuminated by a full moon as we traveled along the China-USSR border.

In this moment of wonderment in Eastern Siberia I was reminded of another experience over thirty years earlier when I heard stories about Siberia every day. Displaced Persons related these accounts to me from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania whom I interviewed as a young volunteer resettlement officer in Western Germany. Families had been separated in sudden deportations to Siberia, often in the middle of the night. These vast expanses had swallowed up millions, many of whose fates will never be known. In Khabarovsk we encountered a young student who was jogging along the North Bank of the Amur as we strolled out of our hotel into the cold October afternoon. He caught sight of our Western trench coats and after a moment of hesitation approached us with a greeting in English. He was studying medicine and mentioned that while he had spent nearly all his twenty some years in Khabarovsk he had been born in Latvia. Since we would be visiting Riga at the other end of our USSR trip we asked him about his home country. Either he had no memories since he had been too young when he left or he chose not to remember. However, he may have been reacting like many second-generation emigrants in the United States who have been eager to forget their origins. Whatever the reasons I could not but speculate about the possibility that I may have met his relatives in refugee camps over three decades ago, before he was born.

Community in Strange Places

This sabbatical year was designed to focus on community and renewal. Wasn't Siberia a strange place to be on such an assignment? Would not the destruction of community and human hope be a more appropriate agenda here?

Perhaps our interest in community had its origins in the breakdown of community in the lives of the refugees we knew and in the lives of people coming to the ARC Retreat Community whose personal relationships were in disrepair. But perhaps Siberia was an appropriate place to begin for the moment of breakdown of established communities might be their moment of breaking open. One hesitates even to entertain that idea because the suffering, injustice and anguish are so enormous that the suggestion that something good could emerge seems an additional and thoughtless cruelty. But out of such upheavals new beginnings have come for people in places they had not chosen and under conditions that any rational person would never deliberately select. Helmut Golwitzer described his displacement to Siberia as a German prisoner of war in the book, *Unwilling Journey*. From that awful experience came wisdom and strength for a rich and purposeful life. Was that same strength also present here amidst the poverty and harsh climate?

Since many of the books we had taken with us from the States might be suspect in the USSR, we had mailed them on ahead to our destination in Uppsala, Sweden, where we planned to spend most of the year. Finding ourselves without reading material except for the free handouts on the train about Marxism (all quickly replenished the moment you took one) we purchased some books in Khabarovsk in the English section of a large bookstore. The bookstores were not jammed full as they had been in China, but they were doing a brisk trade and books were relatively inexpensive. There were the usual classics of Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and Tolstoy. I bought two volumes. One was a collection of stories by Dostoyevsky and the other a novel about Siberia by Georgi Markov. The latter volume provided my reading while traveling through the very parts of Siberia it described. The story was filled with the mystic power of the Siberian forests and the high and somewhat romantic adventure of its pioneers. One sensed the exhilaration of "unlimited opportunity" - quite different from the view of Siberia held by the refugees I had met.

The Soviet Intourist Agency that supervises all foreign travel closely is very careful not to lose anybody in Siberia where so many have been lost. Tourists were shown only the energetic, pioneering and hopeful side of the story such as the incredible building projects going on in mineral rich Siberia. Whole new cities were being built by young families recruited from all over the USSR by economic incentives and the challenge of opening up new lands. Some of these were the descendants of the prisoners, exiles and forced laborers who came to work the mines and build the railroads. Perhaps everybody wished to forget that cruel history as people do elsewhere in the world whose ancestors had been the indentured servants, slaves and prisoners who built the transportation systems across the wilderness only to be forgotten by their descendents.

If out of the cruel history of Siberia new communities do emerge with a human face it will have little to do with the way power and planning have been employed by the authorities, Czarist or Communist. Rather, it will have to do with the spirit of men and women who were able to survive a severe climate, persecution, bungling bureaucracy, war, pestilence and their own foibles. The primal drive for community goes very deep and its attainment lies finally in the hands of the people themselves. Siberia, then, was not such a strange place to be on this quest after all. North American middle class whites, like ourselves, wearied by affluence and its hectic pressures, needed to be reminded of the price paid by our pioneer fore parents free and slave alike whose unquenchable spirit refused to be defeated. It was the sharp contrast of finding that spirit in unexpected places on our trip that made the deepest impression on us. In China, for example, we had been impressed by the people who genuinely expressed their joy at meeting us and who appeared to work with hope for a new future of their own design. In the USSR we got a quite different impression, nonetheless we discovered pockets of resistance to despair.

One such encounter took place in Estonia with two young couples from Georgia (USSR) happily celebrating their honeymoons in a satellite "Republic" similar to their own. They were eager to share their joy with others and took us at first to be natives. Ruth, who was raised in North Dakota and spoke Norwegian before she learned English in grade school, has never been taken for an American. They invited us to join them. We were showered with hospitality and friendship. When they discovered that we were from North America they began to relate with great pride (and with some danger to themselves) their struggle to maintain their own language and culture in the Republic of Georgia. They were quick to clarify that they were not Russians. All of them were too young to have any memory of their country in its days of independence, yet they were fiercely loyal to their own ethnic tradition and to a different understanding of community from the official one.

In that same city the night before, we had encountered some younger people, ages 16 to 22 (just a few years younger than our own five children), whose spirit of hope and determination was a magnificent testimony to the deepest origins of human community. They met once a week to sing folk songs though actually their main purpose was to be together for worship and Bible study. Already in their very young years they had suffered the penalty for their

continuing involvement in the church. They were denied the educational opportunities available to them had they been active in the state approved activities. We made contact with them through a local pastor we had met earlier that day. He arranged a place where we might find them late that night. We had tickets for a Brahms' Requiem Mass Concert in the city concert hall that evening but left during the final section to make our rendezvous.

It was a dark night and raining very hard as we left the hall. Out in the street we could still hear the words of the choir, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for they shall be comforted." The concert hall had been packed and the message of this familiar work with its treasured words from the Beatitudes worked a special spell over us. We made our way in the rain walking silently with the music and words impressed on our minds. When we came to the meeting place in the old town we were greeted by some fifteen young people singing folk songs and hymns. They also were much too young to have experienced their own country's independence. They were the products of an educational system that had attempted to mold them into its ideological framework. But they sang with a spirit of joy and pride in their native culture and with a hope that belied all the jargon of the official system that confronted us at every turn. Banners on factories, billboard slogans, newspaper articles, radio and TV had constantly assaulted them. But these youth were deliberately searching the past legacy of their nation and finding strength from older memories.

Earlier, in Riga, we had met a retired gentleman who also lived from memory. We did not see him at first as we walked through the courtyard of an old church under reconstruction. Because of its age and historic value it was being preserved as a museum. In addition to the two of us there were a few older people. He recognized that we were visitors and asked us in German if we would like to have the historical items explained to us. He was already doing that in Latvian to a group of three elderly women and graciously shifted his tour guiding to two languages for our benefit. It was a delightful and unexpected pleasure to have a private tour. At the end as we were about to part he asked if we would like to see other sections of the old city which, he explained, was his hometown. Since the study of the history of the city had become his special hobby after retirement, he had applied to be one of the official guides. But his application was refused, because, as he explained to us, "They don't want people of my age who know too much about the past!" We realized then that the guides we had had were all too young to know any other history than the one they were instructed to relate. The longer we were together the more he shared of his own past which included ten years in Siberia North of the Arctic Circle. "I can no longer live in the present," he explained. "That is too difficult. All I can do is live in the past." He had immersed himself in a detailed study of the ancient history of his city and gave us a point-by-point description of nearly every stone. It proved to be a tour that was beyond - as well as outside - the official ones.

"Have you any hope?" we asked as we departed.

"No, none at all . . . I can only survive by recalling the past."

In American society where one is usually advised not to "dwell in the past" our guide's response might have been questioned. But such criticism seemed manifestly out of place. And indeed what he said made much sense to us in that situation for there was much to be learned from the past. Its careful study could be the seedbed for possible futures.

Planned Settlements

As I continued to watch the passing Siberian landscape of this land whose settlement had been as harsh as the climate, I was struck by a strange irony. Unlike the haphazard development of some societies from roving bands of hunters to a more settled agricultural life where one lived with the rhythms of nature, the settlement of Siberia had been carefully planned. During most of the present century that planning had been done in the name of liberation for the common people and according to the "scientific" principles of an historical process. The deprivations and fears of the old regime would be removed by Marxist socialism. But Murphy’s Law ("If it can go wrong it will") appears to have prevailed here as elsewhere where bureaucratic planning has sought to control the development of human community. "I don't doubt that it is often done with the best intentions," a friend was to tell us later when we spent several weeks in the German Democratic Republic. He called it a "Pharisee system" which in the name of the highest moral principles inflicted the greatest injustices.

What the well intentioned moralists seem inevitably to do is to shape reality according to some "ought," some preconception of what should be, and when they have the power, what "will" be. The effort to form the "Great Society" from the "think tanks" in the nation's capitol is a case in point. Well-intentioned designs for humanizing

poverty areas through careful planning seem to produce reverse results. In the early 1950's we lived in Park Forest, Illinois, a completely planned community that had over 120 community organizations including a club for parents of twins. It was a synthetic community with a 30% turnover each year and with little holding power. The people lived in a city planned by others. As a result their commitment to community was as tenuous as their two or three year job placements by the corporations for which most worked. The root systems were very shallow.

Many such communities that sprang up after World War II suffered from what external experts thought residents ought to have. Whether that ought is future oriented (the liberal version) or past oriented (the conservative version) it suffers the "farsightedness" of utopian approaches that ignore or belittle what the people can do by themselves. Those possibilities of what already existed were hidden in the roots and invisible to the central office, the planning commission, the task force and the professionals who are only too eager to implement their Five-Year Programs, Comprehensive Plans, Party Platforms and Unified Budgets.

Somewhere in the late '60's when so many citizens recoiling from the upheavals in the cities were asking, "What can we do?" some unknown genius suggested that we shift from "oughtness" to "isness" and discover first what ordinary people were already doing at the base. For me personally that advice was like going through Alice in Wonderland's mirror. At that time I was involved with networks in North America and Europe developing citizen mobilization programs that functioned like political campaigns stimulating public discussion through the extensive use of the media. We, the designer/planners, thought we knew what the citizens "ought" to be about. The same "oughtness" can be seen in the superior attitude the "developed world" assumes over the "under-developed world." The term "Pharisee" seemed appropriate for here was a "moral" posture that can easily disguise a destructive process. The idea of "isness" was revolutionary in the true sense of the word: a radical change, a completely new way of looking at the issues. The subsequent decision to discover and report the extraordinary things ordinary people were doing rather than promote what nobody was doing, led to the creation of the People's Fair. Africans told us later that this was the way they did things through their grass roots bartering of ideas and resources in their Market Fairs.

The Challenge of Nature

Siberia is a land where the natural forces present a formidable challenge to those who come to tame and exploit its abundant resources. Although the expanses were greater and the climatic conditions more severe, the process was not unlike the conquest of the American continent a century earlier. In the case of Siberia, however, the controls were more centralized and the technology more advanced. The effort has been of epic propositions and duly celebrated in the museums we visited. The rhetoric, however, sounded strangely familiar. The bravado ("We have the biggest, the most powerful . . .") of a manifest destiny can easily divert the impressionable visitor from the actual history. Armies of technicians and construction workers, factories, power plants, dams, new cities, roads, airfields, power lines, etc have visibly altered nature. Despite all these efforts, however, nature will have the final word as is so clearly being demonstrated in the heavily industrialized and highly "civilized" countries. In Siberia, nonetheless, development continues unabated as though the problem of pollution does not exist. The natural resources are being exploited just as the human slaves had been who were forced to do the work of the initial settlement. Their descendents are facing new struggles as the stresses and pressures of modern society and a host of social problems are moving relentlessly into this virgin land. Already detritus from the chemical and wood processing plants pollutes many of the rivers flowing into giant Lake Baikal, which contains one sixth of all the fresh water in the world. Certain species of fish are becoming extinct on some of the great rivers like the Volga, Irtysh, Belaya and the Kama.

Production is everything. Large posters on factories, railway stations, billboards and institutions call the population to greater and greater efforts. All other values including the care of the earth are subordinated to production. Some months later, when driving East of Berlin, a friend pointed out an abandoned hospital surrounded by huge cement factories belching their fumes into the air so that a permanent fog enveloped what had once been a beautiful wooded lake resort area. "The patients had to be moved because they became ill from the polluted air when they came to the hospital," he explained. This was all too familiar. These same scenes are repeated all over the planet. Wherever the industrial revolution has enshrined the god of Production in the modern pantheon, the powerful tools of science and technology driven by human greed have facilitated the modern crusade of conquest and control.

I too had been beguiled by the planning process and the engineering of human community by the use of the latest methods and devices of communication applied, of course, with the best of intentions for raising the consciousness of the masses and molding society through citizen campaigns and media directed community dialogs. Was that really anything different from the efforts of planned community I could so easily criticize in the USSR? And had

we not also run into Murphy's Law leaving the citizens more baffled, with a greater sense of powerlessness and with an even worse case of social paralysis and apathy than before? This question is as unfathomable as the endless Siberian forests. Perhaps the answer is actually a simple one but one so threatening to our most cherished beliefs that we cannot entertain it long enough to recognize its truth? The frightening reality is that a whole dimension has been ignored or at least deliberately devalued over against production and consumption. The suspicion that there was indeed a forgotten dimension that was being sacrificed had already been boring away within. Indeed it had led Ruth and me to explore an alternative way by establishing ARC: a micro effort for a macro problem.

Another Scale

In Siberia the scale is immense: macro nature, macro industries, macro rivers, macro lakes. In such a setting it seemed bizarre to consider the micro world of personal life and small human community as any match for these colossal dimensions. Was not the world, East and West, controlled by huge government and military enterprises, gigantic multinationals, vast institutions and impenetrable bureaucracies and all that the code word "The System" denoted? And had not 30 AD or 313 or 1066 or 1548 or 1848 or the '60's proved once and for all that the powerful and the mighty are in charge? Did not the present concentration of power in this enlightened age of science belong either to the priestly class of experts, technical wizards, computer programmers, financial manipulators and politicians on the one hand or to mindless security forces on the other?[1] Where in the face of all of that could the individual or base group make any difference? Nonetheless, I still harbored the suspicion that things "ain't what they appear to be." We were traveling through Siberia at this moment because the longer journey on which we had deliberately embarked some years ago had to do with the small and not the big.

Three months earlier when we set out on our trip, we spent some days in Berkeley, California. Each night the first item on the evening news was the latest count of the Mediterranean fruit fly that was invading the valleys of California and threatening a fruit crop of some two billion dollars. Traps had been set up to catch this barely visible creature and road blocks between infested and non-infested valleys were set up to control the invasion. A political crisis had arisen for the governor who at first sided with the conservationists opposed to chemical spraying, but then, under heavy pressure from the fruit growers desperate to save their crops, had approved some spraying. The whole state was in an uproar because of a tiny insect. One morning during a conference we were attending someone made the astute theological observation, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Mediterranean fruit fly." What is small can make a big difference.

There are powerful micro forces already at work in the soil. One is Monika, a young woman we were to meet some months later. Quite by accident we met a Catholic priest who suggested we go to a certain address one night in Leipzig (then the German Democratic Republic) and meet a group of young people who gathered once a week for an ecumenical prayer service. After some searching in the dimly lit streets we found the place. A small cluster of young people was waiting at the address for someone with a key to show up. Undaunted by the lack of a key, they decided to go to the nearby flat of one of the women in the group and left a note for latecomers to join them there. We followed the group to an apartment block and up to the top floor into living quarters shared by several people in the group. A small bedroom was quickly transformed with candles and icons into a place of worship. We all sat shoulder to shoulder on the floor. A simple service based on the Taizé liturgy was held and brief prayers shared. Informal introductions followed. The group was intrigued by our presence and asked us to share something about our life in a small ecumenical community in North America. It was Monika who took the initiative. She seemed to be the natural leader of the group which. The group normally met in a parish meeting room, which was legal, but that night they were taking some risks since such gatherings in private quarters were not permitted. It was also somebody's birthday and a cake was there. The "cover" of a party was available, just in case.

We were very impressed with Monika. There was something about her quiet presence and determination in the midst of a police state that was special. "Could we talk some more?" she asked as the meeting was over. We agreed to come to her flat a few days later on a Sunday afternoon. It was walking distance from where we were staying. When we came to her street we noticed that the usually drab buildings were even more dismal, in fact some were partly destroyed. Perhaps they had remained so since the war, but there were signs that the whole area was being torn down. For the moment, however, it had been left in a kind of limbo awaiting future destruction. Picking our way through rubble we found the back entrance to the flat of Monika and her two friends. The building was in disrepair but one room was tastefully furnished. A table had been set for tea. Eventually about twenty other young people showed up, a few had been at our first meeting. There was also a birthday cake. (Was this the standard cover?) Under Monika's gentle prompting the stories of the young people came out. Each shared his or her own life situation and aspirations. Monika's story was especially interesting to us. She had moved into this run down area

deliberately in order to offer day care services to the many single parent families on welfare. Officially in the German Democratic Republic welfare cases did not exist. There was a labor shortage and good jobs were readily available, but Monika had taken a job as scrubwoman which was a menial work nobody else wanted but which allowed he officially to work part time. She made this choice in order to be available for her self-appointed ministry to the children. She and the two women roommates kept a regular schedule of daily prayers in their humble quarters. They did not have a formal connection to the institutional church. In fact the members of the group that afternoon seemed to be unsure of the religious traditions from which each came. They simply met and undertook the things they felt were important to them with no leadership from traditional church structures.

There was something special about Monica. We discovered others like her on this trip. We began to suspect that adversity evokes hidden gifts in people and that suspicion became a conviction. What appeared at first glance as small and frail took on new significance. One does not see these signs of new beginnings from the windows of a train traveling through Siberia, or from the commuter bus on the freeway or from a plane flying over the plains, or from a satellite searching out missile sites or from a computer processing reams of sociological data, or from a research paper analyzing political and economic trends. The micro world is undetectable and therefore can continue along its own lines of development safe from the interventions of those who claim to know what ought to be.

In the summer of 1977 Ruth and I were guests at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study center near Philadelphia. We went there during the break between the two work-study camps of volunteers that were putting up the cedar log building of the ARC Retreat Community in the woods in Isanti County, Minnesota. There were others at Pendle Hill from different types of communities sharing their experiences and aspirations. At the closing session, Parker Palmer of the Pendle Hill staff gave us all a most appropriate gift. He read a story of a solitary human being whose persistent planting of trees over a period of nearly half a century transformed barren wastelands in the region of Province in Southern France. As Palmer read from the text we were strangely moved by the words:

> The wind, too, scattered seeds. As the water reappeared, so there reappeared willows, rushes, meadows, gardens, flowers, and a certain purpose in being alive. But the transformation took place so gradually that it became part of the pattern without causing any astonishment. Hunters, climbing into the wilderness in pursuit of hares or wild boar, had of course notices the sudden growth of little trees, but had attributed it to some caprice of the earth. That is why no one meddled with Elzeard Bouffier's work. If he had been detected he would have had opposition. He was undetectable. Who in the villages or in the administration could have dreamed of such perseverance in a magnificent generosity?[2]

Beyond Control

What aggressive Western "civilization" had ignored at its peril in the 19th and well into the 20th centuries in the development of North American society was the unmanageability of the enterprise. The Indians who had learned to live within the rhythms and limits of nature rather than controlling them were arrogantly dismissed as savages. These first settlers had a sense of space and pace and an appreciation of the interdependence of the human spirit and the environment. They knew that what would be required for a sustainable and meaningful existence would have to come from the organic rhythms of the human soul and the delicate balances of nature. The separation of grace and nature in European/North American culture has had destructive consequences for both humans and the environment. The process of community development is more subtle, organic and unpredictable than the plans that come from the drafting tables of the bureaucrats or the theories of the academic elite. Human development involves an element mystery. This was suggested by Johann Metz at a l979 Reformation celebration in Munich when he quoted an old Latin phrase, *Spiritus Sanctus nec scepticus est nec opportunus*, which he translated, "The Spirit of God is neither with the skeptics nor with the totally satisfied. It still blows where it wills, when it wills - yet at the same time only as long as it wills".[3]

While the process of community development may be beyond human control it still requires human participation. If the spirit of people and the fragile growth of community cannot be managed from above since it is an organic/spiritual process, then a new understanding of reality is required in which nature and grace are not opposed but closely linked. Of course, such an understanding would actually be very ancient. The injustices to both nature and grace are only too clearly documented in the assaults on the "Siberians" of the world - the American frontier, the diamond mines of South Africa, the North Sea oil fields, the uranium deposits in Namibia, the coffee plantations of Central America or the sacred lands of the Lakota Indians of South Dakota. The "have dominion" of Genesis 1 is

not a license for exploitation but a command that invites a sensitive exploration of the connections between spirit and nature, between social and economic justice, between human community and physical environment.[4]

Refuge in the Wilderness

From time immemorial the wilderness (unmolested nature) has served as the refuge for the weary or oppressed even when they were there on an "unwilling journey". New communities have been forged through wilderness journeys such as the Exodus of Israel, the Long March of modern China, the Boer's Trek, and European migration to North America. Although the wilderness has lured some to exploit it unprotected resources, the wilderness has also been the place of healing the human spirit. The endless forests that rushed past us hour after hour reminded me of the white pines and poplars of the ARC forest where we lived. "How strange", I thought, "that our own personal struggle for justice and social change should have led us to the woods". In the sturdy silence of that forest we and many guests at ARC have found new perspectives and healing. In fact ARC is located on the site of a community established 1,000 years ago by Indian people who made a long journey from what is now Illinois to the ARC woods. Retreating to the woods might appear to many as a flight from hard social realities but that is belied by the historical fact that again and again the exiles, the refugees, the prophets and other explorers have returned from wilderness sojourns to inspire and transform society.

Was it such a preposterous idea to think of Siberia in connection with a holistic spirituality of nature and grace? On my lap lay a novel about Siberia with a romantic tale of a refugee sought by the Tsarist police who had found protection and solace deep in the Siberian forest during the early months of l917 on the eve of the revolution. My eyes returned from the scenery outside that had stirred these reflections to the final pages of the novel. The hero, Ivan Akimov, after harrowing escapes finally reached Sweden (also our destination!). He is too late, however, to see his beloved professor whose scientific investigations of Siberia had documented a wealth of minerals, agriculture, wildlife, and water and timber resource so enormous that adventurers and foreign agents contrived to seize the professor's detailed report. A few days after the professor's death Ivan discovers the coveted manuscript and reads:

> More and more frequently I wonder: Who, what social stratum is capable of raising the productive powers of Siberia, breathing life and activity into its expanses, and realizing in actual fact that brilliant behest of Mikhailo Lomonsov: "Russia might be multiplied by Siberia?"
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> I toss and turn, I rack myself in thought, and however I look, I see only one face capable of undertaking that titanic work - the party of Social Democratic Bolsheviks. It has the brain, the valour, the boldness, and its roots go deep down among the people, and therefore it is heir to the future.
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> My country is on the eve of social upheavals. The storm not only destroys but also creates conditions for the growth of new forces. Even on the sectors it lays bare the forest will grow thicker and stronger. Let us not fear the storm. Let it rage like a whirlwind.[5]

The whirlwind came and it destroyed. These lines by Georgi Markov were written in l938 in the midst of one of the greatest waves of arrests and deportations of the Stalinist era. Such sentiments propelled the author into the upper echelons of the USSR Supreme Soviet. However, his vision turned into the tragic story of prisoners flowing into Siberia as described years later by Alexander Solzhenistyn: "Nineteen thirty seven: a whole Volga of the People's grief. . . . . The waves flowed underground through the pipes, they provided sewage disposal for the life flowering on the surface."[6]

Were we not seeing only the surface, as the Soviet authorities would hope we might? We road comfortably in the luxury of the "soft class" and viewed from a distance the villages whose harsh life was in sharp contrast to the mild inconveniences of malfunctioning plumbing in the Intourist hotels. Furthermore, becoming alarmed about the problems in Siberia could divert attention away from the political and economic realities in which we lived back home. Looking out the window could be an escape, a kind of "political pietism" that decries the evil that is quickly identified in the other while ignoring those same realities within one's own society.

"That is especially the trap of the intellectual," said Jørgen, a Danish friend at a l973 workshop on education for peace and justice. "It's what I call 'empathy ignition'. We become very agitated about injustices far away and fail to connect that up with our local situation. In the UN such behavior is called 'Afghanistanism' ". Jørgen went on,

however, to warn against the problem of parochialism. To shift from global to local reality can easily lead to a dangerous isolationism. A healthy balance between local and global perspectives is needed. Siberia and the ARC woods belong together as do the macro and the micro and the public and the personal. That balance is, however, rare. It has been difficult explaining to friends why we moved from the city to the woods for it appeared to them as a shift away from our involvements in social justice. The reason for such a move is not evident to many and certainly not logical. Forces we could not explain nor even name at the time were driving us. But years later we heard the explanation for such behavior. Quite by accident we turned on the car radio while vacationing in Nova Scotia in l989 and heard an interview on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation with Jean Vanier. That very day was the twenty fifth anniversary of the founding by Vanier of the L'Arche movement, now an international network of homes for mentally challenged adults. Jean Vanier came from a prestigious Canadian family. His father was one Governor General of Canada. Vanier had pursued an academic career but following a profound spiritual experience left a promising teaching career and established a resident community with two retarded men in a village north of Paris, France. That micro act eventually had global consequences with scores of such communities being established around the world. During the radio interview Vanier was asked if he had any idea at the time that his personal decision would be the beginning of a global movement. Vanier laughed and then said (and when he spoke the following words I nearly slammed on the breaks for I knew something of enormous significance had just been revealed to us). "No not at all", he replied. "I neither *knew* nor *understood* what I was doing. I just had to do it." Quite spontaneously I found myself shouting to Ruth, "That's the end of the Enlightenment!"

Vanier helped us to understand our own decision in establishing the ARC Retreat Community in l976. We too did not know or understand but had to do it. Though the reasons were not easy to explain to others the motivations were compelling. One of the reasons was personal integrity. If in the settings of our most intimate relationships we were unable or unwilling to make changes, or if our rhetoric about what "ought" to be on a grand scale for others concealed the contradictions of our own reality, then we were living fraudulent lives. On the other hand, if our personal worlds, though micro in scale, contained, at least in embryo form, the same issues that confronted us at the national and global level then we were not powerless to respond to them. On the contrary, in our personal worlds we were close to the center of the issues. The power of personal response is not in the scale but in the mystery of the powers of replication, like microbes. Perhaps the revolution that will make the greatest impact in the long run consists of do-able acts within the range of people's own possibilities rather than in the kind of immense social projects so evident in Siberia. Such responses at the personal level can be replicated; they are contagious and even dangerous. The kingdom of heaven may be like a Med Fruit fly after all.

More Immediate and Intimate

The scale of Siberia really is too much to grasp. The historical processes and forces at work in this land like those elsewhere in the world are so overwhelming as to stifle at the start any individual or local initiatives. My attention was diverted again from the scenery outside and the utopian language of the book on my lap to my most immediate contact with society, my traveling companion on this and other longer journeys, Ruth. After all, here was the beginning for me of base community. But it was so close that is was easily overlooked. "God is hidden", someone had said, "in those closest to us". I knew that to be profoundly true. There was really no need to travel around the world to learn about the base for human communities. Already, from our other experiences abroad, it was clear that we learned little about the lands we passed through. The significant learning was the new perspective on our own land and relationships gained from being outside one's familiar landscape. The intimate settings and trusted peers in home, church and school are the principles shapers of our lives. That was what Joe Klapper of Columbia University argued years ago in opposition to the general assumption that our values were now in the hands of the mass systems: mass media, mass advertising, mass entertainment. "Small is beautiful" could also be read, "Small is powerful, small is crucial, small is where it's at."

At the time of the Siberian journey our marriage was nearing the end of its third decade. It has been and continues to be rich and rewarding. Our five children were all entering meaningful and challenging careers in various areas of human need. We had had the special excitement of working together as adults as a family along with others in designing and constructing the large cedar log building at ARC in the summer of l977.

However, over a decade earlier Ruth and I had struggled through the rediscovery and reworking of our relationships when challenged to deal with the male/female issue. This is the most intimate and powerful of all social issues and perhaps for that reason the most overlooked and denied reality of all. We came to see this issue as the one most central to community. Like all growth processes it has been painful. As a person trained in the field of social ethics and invited frequently to speak on human rights and justice, it came as a painful shock to realize how unaware and

insensitive I was to the oppression in which I was personally engaged. This not only placed in question the professional training that fostered such a separation of social and personal reality, but placed even more in question my own integrity. Fortunately, there was grace in our confrontation on this issue for in Ruth I had a firm yet gentle teacher. It was she who first made the connection between the micro and the macro by sensing, as she had for many years before articulating it publicly, that we should work on different scale with small groups to get at the larger issues of social justice. She also grasped long before others the insight that the central issue on which other injustices build is the relationship of male and female.

My thoughts went back to July, l972. The scenery was not a dense virgin forest in the USSR but high mountains on the other side of the world in Colorado. We had gone there with our family and the families of other members of a national church board for higher education that I had worked with for over a decade. The meeting was unusual for it was the first time it was to take the form of a retreat. The agenda would be determined during the initial sessions and not before. This was a reversal of the typical business-first-and-personal-considerations-afterwards format. The process was intended to help the group get at the personal concerns that lay beneath professional and institutional ones. That connection was believed to be significant and, as it turned out, it certainly was. By dealing first with the deeper issues that were rarely allowed to surface even in church work, it was anticipated that groups' decisions would be better facilitated. That indeed proved to be the case making it possible to do much of the business of the board during the coffee breaks once deeper levels of confidence and trust were established. Hence the presence of family members is not an inconvenience but a crucial asset.

Opportunity was provided for each person to share his or her personal concerns. Ruth, encouraged by two members of the board, shared her thoughts about the inequalities facing women in higher education. She spoke frankly of what it had been like to be a woman in the higher education system, a wife of a church executive and a layperson in the church. Her decision to speak out came after a painful discussion between us in the late hours of the preceding night for her speaking out meant vulnerability for both of us. She would be making a critique of a system of which I was a part. She also feared being dismissed for not having the right credentials and being an "emotional" woman. But she took the risks and the next morning spoke in quiet but blunt terms. Her sense of honesty for the sake of justice and healing precipitated an open though uneasy discussion for all. She spoke with soft tones yet with the firmness of strongly held convictions and was heard. That set the climate for others to approach the danger zones that had previously been avoided. The risk had been genuine, but it has been more than worth it. It was a powerful and empowering moment for the entire group.

A few months later, after we had moved to Geneva, Switzerland, for a human rights and peace assignment with an international church organization, we were both invited to help plan a retreat on human rights for the staff. This was to be, as the recent board meeting in Colorado, a time for personal sharing rather than a formal policy making session. The planning group agreed that no one should be excluded from the meeting on such an issue. Secretaries and spouses should be included. That, however, was not to be the case. Many of he executives, some of them authors of avant garde statements on human rights elsewhere in the world and quick to criticize injustices in systems over which they had no control, could not face the issue of how they treated those closest to them. "It will destroy the organization", we were warned, gently, of course, with the paternalism shown newcomers to the international establishment. What was not acknowledged was that a nerve had been touched that was so sensitive that the male/female issue was seen as too threatening to be faced openly. The retreat was shifted to a more comfortable focus. But a point had been made and the question of mutual vulnerability had been raised. If where we did exercise power and make decisions freely we would not practice justice, what possible credibility could we have in advocating justice elsewhere? Furthermore, if the truth could not be spoken in love, then it would inevitably be spoken in rage.

As I recalled those painful but rich learning's another journey came to mind that had led from rage to reflection and from protest to prayer. Again it was Ruth who had led the way. Just prior to the experience of trying to get an international agency to hold a retreat on human rights, Ruth was invited to participate in a small contemplative retreat at the Communité de Grandchamp, an ecumenical community and retreat center near Neufchatel, Switzerland. There in the quiet hospitality of the sisters who knew how to honor the inward journeys of their guests, Ruth came to recognize that her years of lonely struggle as a woman provided a valuable resource that could give her the inner strength to continue her work for human liberation as a woman and eventually establish a retreat ministry. It was at Grandchamp that the idea of the ARC Retreat Community began to take shape.[7]

The discovery of the connection between the inner and the outer, like the connection between the micro and the macro, provided a sense of wholeness so nurturing of life and hope. It represented perhaps the richest learning in

our journey together. In that small compartment on the Trans-Siberian train moving through a strange country, the promise of "where two or three are gathered" took on a special significance. Somehow in the immenseness of this land and in the midst of so perplexing and disheartening an age, hope was to be found in the one area where personal decision and effort could make a difference. As the old liberation song put it: "If two and two and fifty make a million, you'll see the day come soon, you'll see the day come soon".

On the eve of beginning his prison term in Siberia, Dostoyevsky wrote,

> I am not despondent and have not lost heart. Life is life everywhere . . . . There will be people around me: to remain a human being among them, to be always human if the face of any misfortune, to keep one's courage and not to fall - that is what life is about, that is the supreme challenge.[8]

Those words of Dostoyevsky stirred old memories in me of the summer of l947 where amidst pines and birches not unlike the Siberian landscape the wilderness had spoken to me too. And a conversation about that summer came to mind. It has taken place in an unusual place: sitting on some logs in the wood storage room at ARC. It was probably the least comfortable place in the retreat center for a conversation with a visitor, Henri Nouwen. There were no windows and the rough logs were hardly suitable chairs. But when you are into an interesting conversation you pay little attention to that. It seems that the really important things are shared often in the least convenient places. We were talking about education and community, a favorite topic of my conversation partner. Nouwen was at that time a professor of pastoral theology at Harvard and a very popular teacher. Though his classes were over subscribed, he was not satisfied that the academic classroom was the best place for the kind of learning he hoped would happen. He had come to ARC for a brief visit and had shared his dream of establishing a small community someday as a place to train future pastors. That comment occurred in the log storage room during a tour of the ARC building and we stayed there for a long time talking.

I was intrigued with his ideas. Ruth and I had spent two summer seminars with him and others at Pendle Hill near Philadelphia talking about just this issue. We had also read his books that had provided us with many insights about hospitality, spirituality and community. Henri Nouwen is a Dutch priest whose writings and experiences has been an inspiration to many people. But at the height of his professional success he was not satisfied. As we talked I shared with him what had been my best learning experience and I realized that it had happened in a small, intentional community outside the traditional classroom. Actually the idea had been hatched on campus, not in a classroom but in the Art Barn - a building that looked like a barn and housed the art studios at St. Olaf College.

It was the early spring of l947. During the year a group of students had been meeting on Friday nights in the Art Barn on campus. We sat on the stools surrounded by unfinished paintings and pieces of sculpture. I'm not sure what one would call our sessions. It was not a course in the regular curriculum and we received no credits. It was more like an open forum. We did study the Bible but we also read and discussed works of literature and art. The two teachers who led the discussions were Arnold Flaten, an artist, and Howard Hong, a philosopher. The sessions were very stimulating and over the weeks the group found themselves becoming a kind of community.

One Friday night Howard Hong planted the seed of an idea that quickly grew into full-blown reality. He told us of a little church on the shores of Lake Superior near the place where he and Arnold Flaten had summer cabins. The church building had burned down recently and he thought it would be a great place for some students to have a summer work camp to help the congregation rebuild. Hong, who had worked with Quakers and the YMCA organizing work camps for German prisoners of war in the USA, suggested a study/work camp in which we could continue having the kind of lively discussions we had on Friday nights. The group immediately took up the idea and a committee was formed to plan the summer program. There were sixteen of us, eight men and eight women. Most of the men in the group, like myself, had been in military service and were on the G. I. Bill, which made our summers relatively free. We agreed to pay for our own food and other expenses that were very modest since the congregation offered to provide housing and building materials. Both Hong and Flaten agreed to join us as the faculty with Flaten also in charge of construction.

That summer of l947 in Hovland, Minnesota I experienced the best educational experience in my life. Although we were not clever enough to negotiate academic credit for taking this "course", it remains in my memory vividly as the most powerful time of learning I have ever had - and that includes study in a number of schools in America as well as abroad. We were housed on the Mons Hanson farm, an old homestead seven miles from Lake Superior shore deep in a beautiful pinewoods. It had been abandoned but we fixed up the house as a dormitory for the women and the old barn as living quarters for the men. The corn shed served as a library and the nearby creek as our washing

facility. Duties were assigned so that we all shared in the housekeeping and food preparation. A farmer in the congregation lent us a milking cow for the summer and for transportation we used Hong's old jeep and trailer.

The schedule for each day began with worship, breakfast, chores and two hours of study. We then climbed into the jeep and trailer and set off down the bumpy road seven miles to the work site. We took along an early afternoon lunch and left two people back at the farm to prepare the evening meal. The groups worked at the church site for seven hours. Our work that first summer (there were three summers of work camps which competed the building) was quarrying rock off the side of the road and laying new foundations. Flaten was a skilled mason so we learned some important construction skills. In the evenings we had lectures and discussions. In addition to Flaten and Hong, several other professors from college spent a few days teaching and working.

I can remember even today specific details of that experience: discussions about Dostoevsky, Berdyaev and Augustine as well as other events during the work/study camp. In fact I can recall them far better than I can recall the names courses I have taken or the professors who taught them. I think the power of that "classroom" was its connectedness, its wholeness. We were learning with our hands and our hearts and our minds and we were learning together as a community. So much education is an individual, competitive affair. We were a community living together, praying together, singing together, eating together, and learning together - students and teachers. There were the inevitable conflicts but even these difficult moments contributed to the lasting value of the experience. On the work site members of the congregation often joined us. This was hardly a sequestered ivory tower environment. The work campers became friends for life. Two years later several from the group joined Hong in Germany where he had gone to direct the Lutheran World Federation's Service to Refugee program.

As I sat in the log storage room recalling this learning community some twenty-eight years later, I realized that I already had experienced the thing Nouwen was dreaming about. We didn't deliberately set out to make it a matter of "curriculum". No fancy theory went into the preparations. We planned the whole thing ourselves as students. We didn't need an expensive campus. We did not disdain physical work but in fact worked very hard physically, mentally and emotionally. Yet together it all meant a rich learning experience. Whether we realized it or not, there was already an ancient model for such an adventure. Jesus taught the disciples in a working community, a kind of traveling learning lab where the life and needs of the villages provided the curriculum.

It’s wonderful to be reminded of such things when I get wood from the ARC log storage room. Who said something about education as two people on a log?

Such were the flood of memories and ideas about the struggle for community - its scale, its nature, its principle actors, the climate needed for its nurture, the interplay of the spiritual, the political and the personal - that traveled with me through Siberia. Above them all hung the mystery of a process about which the 20th Century, stripped of the certainties with which it had begun, seems to know so little. Though we had traveled far, the same theme kept repeating in our experiences in diverse places. It did matter, after all, what happened in the most intimate relationships and in the smallest human group. In the pages that lie ahead I shall explore this theme and I invite you, the reader, to look out of your own windows at what is passing by and reflect on your life and discover the mystery that what is there in your own experiences, your life companions and your neighborhood. Perhaps you will discover hidden roots.

[1]"[The USSR] is not a Communist society either, because the key characteristic of communism envisioned by Marx and Engels is missing. This element is the direct democratic control of economy and the government by the working class itself. Instead the economy and the government are controlled by the Party, which seems to represent the new privileged class rather than the Soviet working class." Comment by lawyer Greg Gaut, "Some impressions of the Soviet Union", unpublished report, February 12. 1982.

[2]Jean Giono, *The Man Who Planted Hope and Grew Happiness* Brooksville, Maine, Friends of Nature, l967, p. 10.

[3]Johann Metz, *The Emergent Church*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., l981, p. 65. For an interesting discussion of being "out of control" see Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character Notre Dame, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, l981. Hauerwas describes "luck" as "fate put to good use by imaginative skills acquired through a truthful tradition" (23).

[4]Rosemary Ruether, *To Change the World*, London: SCM Press, l981, pp. 59, 66-67 makes this observation:

> If dominion over nature means unrestricted rights to pollute and destroy, it is self-defeating. Since humanity is tied inextricable to interdependence with plants, animals, water, soil and air, the health and prosperity of the human community is not possible without the health of the non-human community which encompasses us. Thus ecologists have argued for a new theology and ethic of nature based on mutuality and interdependence rather than domination and subordination. . . . The Western dream of infinitely expanding power and wealth defies the actual finitude of the world and ourselves and conceals the exploitative use of other people's resources. It must be replaced with a new culture of acceptance of finitude and limits. But not in the sense of a "static-state" society which simply fixates the present poverty and inequality. We must *change*, not as endless growth, but as "conversion." Conversion means that we rediscover the finitude of the earth as a balance of elements, which together harmonize to support life for all parts of the community.

[5]Georgi Markov, *Siberia* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, l975, pp. 526-7.

[6]Alexander Solzhenistsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row, l973), pp. 25,47.

[7]For a more complete story of this experience at Grandchamp see Nadia Christensen, *The ARC Story,* ARC Publications: Cambridge, l988.

[8]Fydor Dostoyevsky, *Stories* , Moscow: Progress Publishers, l971b, p. 12.