

## **An Unfinished Poem of Sarov and Los Alamos**

**For Nina Botvinkina, Vicioria Fyordodova, Irina Parfenova, and Tatiana Satioukova  
From Sarov, Russia At the completion of your visit to Los Alamos, New Mexico March 30, 1999**

By Robert J. Thomsen

And now complete is another stanza  
    In these parallel epic poems  
    Of Sarov and Los Alamos.  
We have taken another step in our journey  
    From animosity and mistrust  
    To friendship and understanding  
Between communities so similar  
    And once so divided.  
We need you, just as you need us.

By the poetry of your presence here  
You Russian women have brought to us  
A sample of your vast land,  
So mysterious, so complex.  
Thank you for these glimpses given:  
Your smiles and laughter and tears,  
Your concerns and curious questions,  
Your singing of bitter sweet songs of love  
    That need no translation.  
Your charm and your soft words,  
    In the beautiful Russian language  
    That is so remote to us.  
You have touched our hearts and changed us forever.

\*\*\*\*\*

But what have we not learned of each other  
    During this brief visit?  
How are our two poems still separate  
    And how do they merge?

What are your deep Russian memories  
Only guessed at here?

And what do you still wonder of Americans  
But have not had time to learn?

Of times we are glad to share.

Of happy times.  
Family and friends,  
Precious holidays.  
Favorite food prepared by loving hands.

The soft glow of Christmas tree decorated,  
The Thanksgiving turkey fragrant in the oven,  
Birthday candles and colored frosting,  
Fireworks on the Fourth of July.

Of times of joy in beauty.

A moving poem;  
A delicate flower found in the birch forest.

Sculpture of children playing,  
The choir singing praises to God,  
First snow,  
New buds of spring,  
Gentle wind,  
Warm sunshine

Of times of pride in our country.

Great projects completed.  
Pavlov, Lenin,  
Russian Orthodox Church,  
Sputnik and Gagarin.

The constitution and the bill of rights.  
The stars and stripes flying bravely,  
A national anthem, hand over heart.

Of folk heroes and fairy tales  
That run deep  
To shape our ways of understanding the world.

Baba Yaga,  
Snegurochka,  
Firebird

George Washington, Davy Crockett,  
Paul Bunyan, Cowboys and Indians,  
Three little pigs, The little engine that could.

Of music, art, poetry, literature.

Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov,  
Pushkin, Pasternak,  
Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky.

Copeland, Bernstein,  
Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams,  
Hemingway, Faulkner.

And times we will not speak of  
Except with trusted friends.  
Of times of shame.

I will not guess...

The Viet Nam war,  
Watergate,  
Easy drugs that kill.

Of times of suspicion,

American imperialism.  
KGB

The arms race that built our communities.  
We will bury you.  
The Cuban missile crisis.

Of hard times of worry  
About health, money, security.

Harsh winter,  
Scarce food and fuel.  
Eternal lines.

Cancer, jobs lost,  
Marriages fractured.

Of times of terror.

Family threatened or lost  
In the Great Patriotic War.  
None untouched. Never forget.

Random violence,  
Gangs in search of money and drugs,  
Atomic war.  
Silent pollution.

\*\*\*\*\*

What shall we now do?  
Where will this friendship lead?  
Now we return to our regular lives,  
Each of us in a different place  
But shaped and changed by this visit.  
Will we bring our poems together,  
Creating a new one for the world?  
Of one thing we can be certain:  
Friendship worked at will shrink this world,  
Making safety and peace  
Like no nuclear weapon can.  
And as we bring others along on the journey  
We will strengthen our love and respect for each other,  
For we will be gathering new knowledge and ideas  
For completing this unfinished poem,  
Of Sarov and Los Alamos.