

**Journal Entry #18**  
**May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

**Celebrating Victory Day in Russia:  
The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The End of World War II**

***Celebration or Spectacle?***

On the television, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II in Moscow seemed more like a “spectacle” than a “celebration”. My Russian teacher commented (complained), “This can’t be a celebration for the people if the general public is barred from entering Red Square!” Of course, everyone understands that this is a necessary safety measure given the threat of terrorism, but at the same time, it is true that many Russians celebrated May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005, by sitting at home watching their television sets. For those of us who didn’t, there were multiple special events in Saint Petersburg.

***Decorating and Singing***

For at least two weeks prior to May 9<sup>th</sup>, Saint Petersburg had been preparing for the holiday. Decorations, banners, and red and gold flags that looked mysteriously like the USSR hammer and sickle, were flying all over the city. Grocery stores and restaurants hung little posters that said “60 years” in their windows. Telephone companies handed out yellow flags with a war emblem on one side and their logo cleverly placed on the other (borrowing an American marketing technique, I think).

There were many concerts featuring war-time songs. I attended a concert at *The Saint Petersburg Conservatory*, which included poetry and Shostakovich’s *Seventh Symphony* (also known as *The Leningrad Symphony*). The concert was 3.5 hours long, but every seat was filled (maybe because it was free).

***Parade on Nevsky Prospect***

One of the highlights was a parade of marching bands lead by veterans down Nevsky Prospect, the central street in Saint Petersburg. It was announced that the parade would begin at 4pm, and people started lining up on the street before 3pm. By 3:30pm, it was impossible to get past the crowds; one could only stop and join in the fun of watching this deeply anticipated event.

I positioned myself beside a group of young Russian girls who were chattering away. There was a *babushka* in front of me and some German tourists behind me. As I waited for the parade to begin, I amused myself by eavesdropping on the girls’ conversation (in Russian).

“Lena! We are over here. Come meet my friends: Olga, Sveta, Natasha, and Tanya. Oh good! I got all the names right this time.”

“Why hasn’t the parade started? It’s already 4:30pm.”

“There are still cars driving along the street, so it it’s going to be awhile still.”

“Let’s take a picture of the military officers standing guard on the sidewalk.”

“I can’t get a good shot from here.”

“Well...Ask someone in front of you to take a picture.”

“Someone? Someone? Someone take a picture!” she called, and the girls burst into laughter.

Just then a man pushed past with a camera, and started snapping away.

“Who’s that?”

“Paparazzi.”

“Paparazzi! Go Home!” the girls laughed again. By this time, I was laughing along with them.

“Look! There is a police car.”

“Yeah! Police – the parade must be about to begin! Take a picture!” In the end, it was 5:20pm when the parade finally started, but it was worth it!

### ***Not a Regular Night at The Ballet***

My May 9<sup>th</sup> day finished with a trip to the theater – the way I spend every night that’s not being spent rehearsing in the studio. However, this performance turned out to be a little different “than the usual.”

I went to see the premiere of *Don Quixote* at *The Saint Petersburg Conservatory Ballet Theater*. This is a new addition to The Conservatory’s repertoire, and it featured many of the dancers I have come to know throughout my time here in Russia.

The performance began with the appearance of the Artistic Director, *Nikita Dolgushin*. It is actually quite rare to see artistic directors appear on the Russian stages, but on this particular occasion, it was necessary. Dolgushin appeared in gray military attire and was warmly received by the audience. He briefly greeted us and wished everyone a “Happy Victory Day!” He explained that this was a day marking the end of The Great War, and he hoped “the light content” of the ballet would bring joy. With that, the curtain went up and the orchestra started playing.

At the end of the first act, Dolgushin again appeared, and we stood for a minute of silence. Then, the audience scurried into the lobby for intermission.

### ***Not a Regular Intermission***

I have to say that this was the most interesting and wonderful intermission I have ever enjoyed in a theater. Young girls in bright pink and green dresses greeted us. Carnations were handed to the women, and complementary champagne was available. A band started playing Soviet war-time songs in the foyer, and half of the people immediately started singing along. Then, two old women began dancing together, and soon six more had joined in. It was so amazing to stand at the edge of the cheering crowd watching these grandmothers laugh and cry as they danced away. In my opinion, it was better than the ballet itself!

### ***Where is My Generation?***

I feel very lucky to have been in Russia for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, and I recognize that something like this is a once in a lifetime opportunity. For this reason, I was shocked not to see more young people at the city’s various events. I was definitely the youngest person at The Conservatory’s war-time concert, at *The Mussorgsky Theater*’s performance of *Convoy PQ-17* (a joint Russian-Canadian production), and at the ballet *Don Quixote*. I must admit that there were people of all ages gathered for the parade on Nevsky Prospect, but it concerns me that my generation (Russians, Americans, or foreigners) did not take part in the other events.

When you see the faces of the veterans and their spouses, you *feel* the power of their memories and can *begin* to understand some of the consequences yielded from this horrific war. If we, the new generation, do not seek to understand our past, I fear terrible mistakes will be repeated. While there are still living veterans, I feel it is imperative that we recognize, remember, and celebrate together.

***To Learn More About Rebecca Davis’ studies and travel experiences, visit The Rebecca Davis Dance Company at [www.rebeccadavisdance.com](http://www.rebeccadavisdance.com) or email [davis@rebeccadavisdance.com](mailto:davis@rebeccadavisdance.com)***

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