

Alumni Notes

Students, Postdocs, and Visiting Scholars



Jerry Kisslinger

The Harriman (well, Russian) Institute left a formative mark on me. Undergrad years were memorable, with Professors Belknap, Maguire, and Malmstad in literature; Juviler, Hazard, and Bialer in politics; and Fitzpatrick and Raeff in history. I wrestled every tetrameter of *Eugeny Onegin* under the kind, discursive tutelage of William Harkins. Zbigniew Brzezinski was off in Washington, as was Marshall Shulman. Decades later I had the pleasure of reconnecting with Catharine Nepomnyashchy, whom I knew from student days, while editing her profile of Shulman for the volume *Living Legacies at Columbia*, published for Columbia's 250th anniversary.

Graduating into the Reagan-Brezhnev freeze, I took other paths. Still, I translated accounts of early Alaskan natural history from Russian sources, taught Russian a bit, wrote a book for high schoolers on Serbian Americans and reviews on Balkan issues for *The New Leader*. I perform traditional dance music from Slavic lands and for more than 30 years have taught at workshops run by the East European Folklife Center. One of my bands, Zlatne Uste (meaning Golden Lips in no precise language . . .), hosts the annual Golden Festival in New York.

While directing communications for alumni relations and development at Columbia, I have attended numerous Harriman events and courses taught by Valentina Izmirlieva and Aleksandar Bošković. I continue to look for ways to raise awareness in the Columbia community of the Institute's historic past and highly relevant present. Happy Anniversary to us all!

— **Jerry Kisslinger** (Columbia College, 1979; GSAS, 1982)

When I entered graduate school, it was still the Harriman Institute for the Study of the USSR, and the notion that I'd be able to engage with the Soviets directly seemed remote at best. It was hard to imagine how my Harriman training on Soviet nationalities, economics, trade, security, demography, and geology would help me build a career.

After a few years as a contractor, I joined the Defense Nuclear Agency supporting arms control treaty implementation, and I was able to visit the USSR for the first time in 1990. With the dissolution of the USSR a year later came opportunities to engage with Russians beyond what I'd imagined. I started working with the Russian Ministry of Defense to help secure its nuclear warheads under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program. Over the course of the next 21 years, from 1992 to 2013, my Harriman knowledge was an indispensable foundation for over 80 trips to Russia, including visiting dozens of nuclear warhead storage sites.

I'm fortunate now to serve as a Nonresident Fellow with the Stimson Center, which has supported my efforts to author a series of Field Notes on nuclear security cooperation with Russia. My experience and training have helped me publish studies on "Initiating a Cooperative Denuclearization Effort with North Korea" for the *Nonproliferation Review*, and "Beyond Arms Control: Cooperative Nuclear Weapons Reductions – A New Paradigm to Roll Back Nuclear Weapons and Increase Security and Stability," for the *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*. I'm now a consultant supporting two studies on nuclear warhead verification for NATO and the State Department; and I'm writing a chapter on nuclear security cooperation with Russia for

an upcoming Nuclear Security Handbook for Kings College, London.

—**William Moon** (M.I.A., Harriman Specialization, 1983)

Hunger was the proximate cause of my arrival at Harriman as a Columbia undergrad in 2003. As I wolfed down pizza at the Open House, the Harriman's business manager, Frank J. Bohan, popped into 1219 to recruit work-studies. I was obsessed with “all things Russia, and then some”—and I had a penchant for office work. Hired!

That fall, as we processed honoraria and travel expense reimbursements for the Petersburg 300 Festival, I impressed Frank with my ace spelling of the Slavic speakers' names. When I designated an orange folder to “hold [event flyers] in abeyance,” he lauded my “anticipatory skills.”

Frank called me KK (my then-initials), Aide-de-Camp, and sometimes, Assassinette. He called my Russian boyfriend “the Swain.”

I took “pictures on bypass [paper],” typed memos on “fine fiftieth anniversary,” mailed them interoffice in “Susan Holmes [envelopes].” Frank would only sign with “superior pens,” stashed in a box labeled “Communist Affairs.” He griped about carpal tunnel (“too many clicks”) and editorialized about AP/CAR (“they gave me the shuffle off to Buffalo”).

Alla Rachkov (who was program coordinator at the time) tried to steal me from Frank: once she dialed his extension, posing as “Jenny.” One drawer of her file cabinet is still captioned “Kasialand.”

Over lunch in the Arena, we did trivia. Frank told stories—how he'd walked out of class on a Jewish holiday (“Bohan—like Cohen”).

Frank taught me world-building; Harriman became family.

Fifteen years later, the Swain and I run Redbeard Bikes in Brooklyn. I am writing my first book; read my work at www.tinyletter.com/kasianikhamina.

—**Kasia Nikhamina** (Columbia College, 2007)

From the perspective of more than half a century, I can safely say, today, that it has been my association with the Institute's Program on Soviet Nationality Problems, chaired in the 1970s by Edward Allworth, that has produced the strongest impact on my research interests and on the course of my teaching career. The diverse background of my colleagues in the Program's seminars enriched the class discussions and deepened our understanding of the questions we were investigating. It was under Allworth's editorship that our first written works were published (*The Nationality Question in Soviet Central Asia*, Praeger, 1973). My dissertation, prepared under his guidance, would later appear under the title *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the White Movement in the Russian Civil War* (University of Alberta, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1995). When a few years before retirement as a professor of history at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY), I began to think about writing a new book, it was again the nationality question that captivated my attention. This time, however, my research did not focus exclusively on the nationalities in the Russian Empire, but included the peoples of East Central Europe as well. The book, *Giuseppe Mazzini's Young Europe and the Birth of Modern Nationalism in the Slavic World* (University of Toronto Press,



William Moon



Kasia Nikhamina



Anna Procyk



Christopher Smart



Susanne Wengle

2019), benefited greatly from my encounters with people I befriended at Columbia many years ago and continue to meet at the Institute today.

—**Anna Procyk** (M.A., Political Science; Russian Institute Certificate, 1967; Ph.D., History, 1973)

It's 75 years for the Institute, and roughly 30 since I secured my certificate. With the Soviet Union collapsing as I was spell-checking my dissertation, I got a most unlikely job offer from (pre-Columbia) Jeffrey Sachs to lead a group of economic advisors working in the Russian Finance Ministry. That provided a back door into an unexpected career in Emerging Markets investing, starting with Russia's nascent stocks, then expanding to Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In 2009, I joined the Obama administration, realizing a long-standing ambition since my classes with Zbigniew Brzezinski and Marshall Shulman. I spent four years at the U.S. Treasury, where the Russian "reset" was quickly overshadowed by events in Greece, and then moved to the National Security Council, where Russian issues dominated all too much and the Donbas events triggered a systematic effort to unwind three decades of bilateral rapprochement. Currently in Boston, I run the Barings Investment Institute, a policy and analysis team that focuses on long-term forces that shape financial markets. Clearly, the U.S.-Russian relationship tops most lists these days. I am also lucky enough to have lunch with Bob Legvold from time to time and exchange tweets with @TimothyMFrye (I'm @csmart) to refresh my understanding of a subject that fascinates us all.

—**Christopher Smart** (M.I.A., 1988; Harriman Certificate, 1989; Ph.D., Political Science, 1993)

Between 2000 and 2002, I benefited greatly from the generosity and open-minded teaching at the Harriman Institute; I was a recipient of a Harriman Institute Junior Fellowship and a Harriman Institute/PepsiCo Foundation Fellowship, both awarded to students for their commitment to Russian and post-Soviet studies.

I recently published a new book, entitled *Black Earth, White Bread: A Technopolitical History of Russian Agriculture and Food*. Like all facets of daily life, the food that Russian farms produced and citizens ate—or, in some years, didn't eat—underwent radical shifts in the century between the Bolshevik Revolution and Vladimir Putin's presidency. The modernization of agriculture during this time is usually understood in terms of advances in farming methods. *Black Earth, White Bread* documents a far more complex story of the interactions between political projects, technological improvements, and daily life. Examining governance, production, consumption, nature, and the ensuing vulnerabilities of the agrifood system, the book reveals the intended and unintended consequences of Russian agricultural policies since 1917. Ultimately, the new history of Russian agriculture calls attention to ways in which states shape quotidian practices. The book is available at any bookseller and on the publisher's website, uwpress.wisc.edu/books/6051.htm.

—**Susanne Wengle** (SIPA/Harriman Certificate, 2002)