

# I Never Loved America More Ann Reports on Her Return

(This is the last of a series of 12 articles by the author of America's most popular human relations column.)

By ANN LANDERS

The day I left the United States for Russia I promised myself:

1. I would not engage in political arguments with citizens of the Soviet Union.
2. I would not express in writing political opinions on Russia.

The third day in Moscow, when I visited with Mr. Nickotin, editor of the Moscow News, I broke that first promise. I am about to break the second.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to separate observations on Russian life from the Political system. Russian life IS the system. Soviet citizens depend on the government for employment, housing, education, medical care, food and clothing.

If a Soviet citizen wants his apartment painted he must write a letter to the government. If we want to change jobs he must write a letter to the government. If he wants to visit relatives in Kiev or Sochi he must carry his internal passport, notify the police that he is leaving town and tell them where he can be reached.

Russia is between the old and the new. The old is Communism as administered by Stalin. I didn't see a single picture of Stalin so I asked why. Everyone said the same thing: "Stalin did some good but he lived too long. In his last years he was hopelessly insane—a raving maniac."

UNDER STALIN Communism was inflexible and ruthless. The people suffered indescribable deprivation. There was a shortage of everything—housing, food, fuel. Even the Soviet brass was paralyzed by fear of the mad man at the top. I was told, "When the lunatic was running things you never knew who would disappear next."

But Stalin is dead and Russia has a new look. Khrushchev is "Papa"—and Papa is good. He has made promises and is keeping some of them. Apartment buildings are going up. (They may collapse in a few years, however. Even some of the newest buildings have wire-net canopies to protect pedestrians from falling bricks.) But housing was promised and apartments are going up where people can see them.

THERE SEEMS to be enough food for everyone. It's expensive, but it's available. The stores have shoes, coats, gloves, hats and yard goods. Almost every family has a TV set. There is no unemployment among the able-bodied. I found more freedom in Russia than I expected—perhaps because I expected so little. The first day I arrived in Moscow I heard the usual rumors that circulate in foreign hotel lobbies. I was tipped off by two American tourists who were already authorities on Russian life (they had been there three days.) "Every hotel room is bugged," they

warned. "If you visit in your room turn the radio up loud to louse up the transcription. Don't say things over the telephone. Hide your typewriter under the bed. If they find out you're writing, your papers will disappear."

I neither locked up nor hid anything — and nothing disappeared.

ONE OF THE most stimulating and revealing conversations I had in Russia was with Mr. Nickotin, the editor of the Moscow News. Five years ago such a conversation would not have been possible.

He spelled out what he claimed to be the advantages of the Communist system over capitalism. He concluded his argument with "Communism will win in the end because it makes a good life possible for more people. America is going down hill. We are coming up. You are a self-satisfied, rich, comfort-loving country. Your children are rocking and rolling and riding around in cars without tops. America is sure to lose."

"You are wrong," I told him. "Communism cannot win because man was meant to be free. As the standard of living rises in Russia your people will demand more of everything, including freedom, and you will have no choice but to give it to them."

"YOU ARE WRONG, too Mr. Nickotin, about America going down hill," I continued. "We won our freedom in a bloody fight and we have proven to the world twice in the past 50 years what freedom means to us. Americans are courageous, industrious, and vigorous. You have been printing lies about us for so long you're beginning to believe them yourself!"

When I left Mr. Nickotin's office he shook my hand warmly. There was no feeling of hostility between us although the argument has been heated and the differences in viewpoint sharp.

"You are a warm-hearted and charming lady," he smiled. "A little skinny, but quite attractive. Do come back."

AND I DO want to go back. I want to go back in five years to see for myself how much of the pie in the sky has been delivered.

Although I have been home but a short time, I've been asked the same question count-

less times. "Is the average Russian family happy? The man on the street—is he content?"

To this question I can only reply: I don't know if the average Russian is happy, because I don't know who the average Russian is — and even if I could find him, I'm not at all sure we could agree on what happiness is.

If Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev, during his recent visit had asked the "average man" in Pittsburgh if he was happy, the man might well have said no because he was caught in the steel strike and was worried about the grocery bill and the payments on his

car. NO MAN, or 10 men, can speak for a nation. Every man must speak for himself.

I am grateful to have been able to travel 14,000 miles to meet the Russian people. A great many of them DID speak for themselves. They spoke with sincerity and conviction. No one expressed the hope to me that America would "liberate them." They are well aware that our standard of living is higher than theirs, but they are not crying in their borscht. They are working hard and hoping that tomorrow will be better than today — because

today is better than yesterday.

Since visiting the Soviet Union I am no longer worried about war. Millions of Russian soldiers and civilians died in battle, died in bombings, or froze to death in the last war and the people want no part of another one.

THE RUSSIAN people want the same thing we want—love, understanding, peace. They want to bring up their children in a world safe from destruction. They want to laugh and sing, live and let live.

AND FINALLY: Never have I felt such a deep passion as I

Marine Pvt. Marion C. Bohnon of 22227 S. Vermont Ave., completed recruit training Nov. 26 at the Marine Corps Depot, San Diego.

Marine Pfc. Dale F. Larson, of 17303 Glenburn, is serving with the Third Marine Aircraft Wing at the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, Santa Ana.



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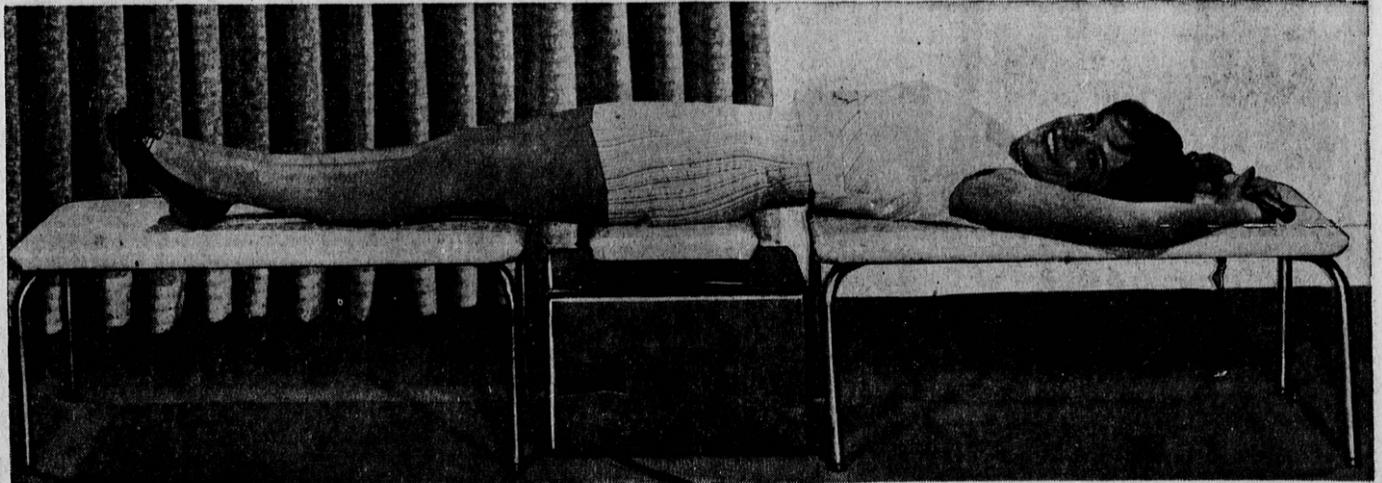
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