

ICWA LETTERS

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young professionals to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. An exempt operating foundation endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

TRUSTEES

Carole Beaulieu
Mary Lynne Bird
Steven Butler
William F. Foote
Pramila Jayapal
Peter Bird Martin
Ann Mische
Dorothy S. Patterson
Paul A. Rahe
Carol Rose
Chandler Rosenberger
John Spencer
Edmund Sutton
Dirk J. Vandewalle
Sally Wriggins

HONORARY TRUSTEES

David Elliot
David Hapgood
Pat M. Holt
Edwin S. Munger
Richard H. Nolte
Albert Ravenholt

Institute of Current World Affairs
The Crane-Rogers Foundation
Four West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 U.S.A.

GF-8

EUROPE/RUSSIA

Gregory Feifer is an Institute Donors' Fellow studying the current political and cultural reshaping of Russia.

Otherwise Engaged: Crime and Punishment in Moscow

By Gregory Feifer

Moscow needed a respite. For months since his election as president in March, Vladimir Putin — eager to put his stamp on the state apparatus — had cracked down hard on his political rivals. He had forced legislation through parliament, dramatically decreasing the powers of the country's influential, sometimes semi-independent, regional governors. At the same time law enforcers pursued some of the country's most powerful businessmen, the so-called "oligarchs" whose riches and influence were rightly perceived to be as great as their violations of legal norms and codes, not to mention ethical and moral ones.

But despite — or, rather, because of — Putin's dramatic rise in strength and stature, the steely president's promise to crack down on Russia's rampant crime and corruption seemed only to have added to the already troubling tension and suspicion gripping the capital. To the ordinary citizen, Putin's vow to enact a "dictatorship of the law" is taking its toll in the form of bribe-taking law enforcers emboldened by the president's law-and-order campaign. When a bomb exploded in an underpass in the city center in August, killing 12, Putin's pledge seemed miles away. Muscovites once again had to add to their list of worries the fear of random acts of violence police seemed powerless to stop. Only when the president and his lieutenants in government resorted to the classic Soviet tactic of denial and bald-faced lying following the sinking of the nuclear submarine *Kursk* did Russians truly begin questioning Putin's qualifications as the top executive of a nominally democratic state. A fire shortly after in Moscow's television tower, the world's second-tallest free-standing structure — and still the pride and joy of Soviet engineers who erected it in 1967 — only rubbed salt in the country's wounds. Russia seemed literally to be falling apart. The atmosphere was especially strained in a month typically taken up by vacation and relaxation, a time when the capital virtually shuts down. This August, more than any other in recent memory, Russians needed a rest from the grind and grit of everyday life.

This ICWA fellow shared the sentiment. As did most August days, one in particular began with a heavy cocktail of Moscow's signature clouds, smog and rain. Despite the overwhelming desire to respond to the weather — political and otherwise — by remaining in bed, I roused myself early to do my usual laps of swimming. The nearby pool I use belongs to an art lycée, where a bribe of under two dollars gets one in. (That's especially nice in winter, when one's hands freeze and stick to the railings of the outdoor public pool I'd frequented earlier.) This time, only two cars — one a rusty Soviet-era Lada and another a gleaming Mercedes — rudely cut me off on the way to the pool, but I was able to avoid collisions as they swerved into my lane by slamming on the brakes. (Accelerating isn't much of an option in my carburetor-fitted Land Rover.) The Mercedes had the added justification of a flashing blue light affixed to its roof, allowing it — nay, compelling it — to avoid traffic regulations. Such lights are issued to important personages such as members of parliament. They are also obtained

for \$30,000, usually by dirty-dealing “businessmen” who buy them for themselves and their bodyguards and other associates.

By the time I got into the water, however, things had begun to look up. The clouds had parted to reveal a glowing sun that warmed a gentle breeze. More important, the pool was almost empty, and I had a coveted lane to myself. The laps finished with ease — for a change — I drove home for breakfast and a read of the daily news. Sitting down at my desk after my bride of two months had left for her own work, I felt a contentment that comes with getting to the computer on time and the expectation that I was going to get a lot done. I’d finished researching and begun writing a newsletter the previous day, and was happy to find the subject one that almost wrote itself. In newsletter writing as in journalism, that’s a good sign. Peter Martin, I felt, was going to like this one.

Just as I’d begun to pick up where I’d left off the day before, the telephone rang.

“Greg, how’s it going!” It was my longtime friend, Kolya, a Reuters television producer with whom I hadn’t spoken in months due to the fact that we’d both been busy. Overwork was the only sign that the tall, good-looking 30-year-old was succumbing to the influences of western capitalism. He remained generous and full of ironic humor, traits countless others of his compatriots have lost during the materialistic grab-fest of the last decade in which disdain for one’s fellow citizens became a mark of success.

Before I had time to answer, the doorbell rang. “For frig’s sake,” I told Kolya. “It’s the doorbell. Probably the city gas works people again come to check our pipes. They’ll keep ringing unless I let them in. Call me back in five minutes, okay? Five minutes.”

“Okay, okay.”

I went to the door annoyed, not bothering to look through its peephole as usual because that would just waste time. The distraction bothered me intensely, and I wanted to get back to writing as soon as possible. Opening the door, I saw a tall crew-cut man in black jeans and a black sweater.

“It’s the police,” he said. “We’re just checking.”

“Just checking what?” I asked, instinctively blocking his way. Local police came by from time to time to register those living in the area for some little-known reason. On top of that, gas people, city electricity meter readers and a host of other civil servants also regularly or irregularly



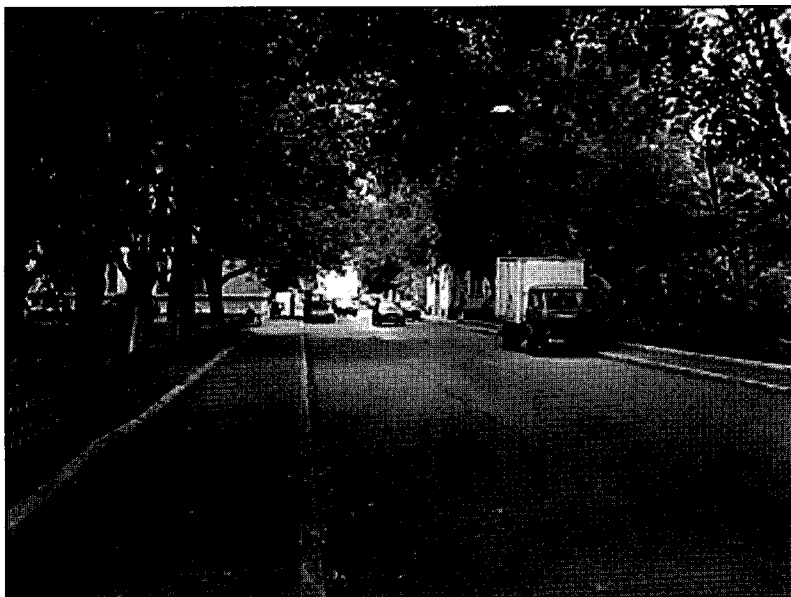
Moscow's skyline was barely visible in August, obscured by smog and fog. That only added to the increasing feeling of oppression on city streets.

made their rounds. They usually dressed in civilian clothes.

The man pushed himself into the apartment. “Okay, just shut the fuck up!” he said, pulling a pistol from behind his back and jamming it into my head. “Just shut up!” Another man followed him. They grabbed me before I could respond. The man with the gun threw an arm around my neck. His associate shut the door.

They pushed me further into the apartment’s entranceway. “Just keep quiet, you hear!” said the man with the gun. His breath reeked of cheap tobacco, but not alcohol. That was a bad sign. Drunks have bad reflexes, which is not reassuring if they’re holding guns, but they’re easy to fight. One good belt in the face is enough. (One solid punch in the face is usually enough for a sober man, but for a drunk, it’s the end of any struggle.) The second man’s breath reeked of the same tobacco. They’d probably just had a smoke to steel themselves before ringing the doorbell. Visitor Number Two had on a cheap polyester sport jacket. Both men looked as if they were in their forties. Their faces were ruddy. Clearly they weren’t well off. No doubt they belonged to the international brotherhood of common thugs, whose Russian chapter had dramatically boosted its membership in the nine years since the Soviet collapse.

Encouraging Moscow’s ubiquitous meatheads such as my two new acquaintances is the fact that brute power seems to matter most in Moscow — literally. Pedestrians on supposedly protecting crosswalks must constantly jump out of the way of speeding cars. Tiny, obsolete Russian-made Ladas have to give way to gleaming, tint-windowed Jeep Cherokees, which often drive on the wrong side of the street into opposing traffic to save a few minutes. In short, human life means very little, almost as little as the laws ostensibly meant to protect it. In fact, regulations actually



Malyi Levshinsky Street, where my apartment stands. The pleasant central side street near the Kremlin boasts many pre-Revolutionary gems, a number of which have been renovated by the increasing numbers of wealthy Russians setting up businesses and moving into the area.

exist to be broken because the real law of the land in Russia is unspoken. Strength rules, which is why police, for example, derive their boldness not from the law or the Constitution — ha! — but from a menacing Putin.

The men now holding me against a wall were obviously not high up on the food chain. Crime is universal, of course. But under Russia's Byzantine state apparatus, making an honest living is difficult, meaning breaking the law has inevitably become society's way of life. These two had simply taken matters into their own hands, perhaps having decided to move up the ladder. Maybe they'd seen me get out of my car and walk into my apartment building. Perhaps they'd canvassed the neighborhood and seen my brand-new western steel door (installed by my American predecessor), a sign that there must be goodies inside.

My apartment building is in an attractive, central, pre-Revolutionary neighborhood of narrow streets whose inhabitants are generally more civil than the bulk of the population crammed into Moscow's massive sprawl of concrete-slab tenements.

While all westerners tend to stick out as possible crime victims, my area boasts many wealthy residents and a number of foreign embassies whose employees make it easier to blend in. Nonetheless, a relative democracy of demographics resulting from years of Soviet-assigned housing means all kinds live in all areas. While Moscow — whose

population reaches to around 13 million — is generally said to be statistically safer than many other megalopoli, there are generally few "safe" or especially dangerous neighborhoods. One has to be on his guard at all times.

My own three-room apartment itself is not new; it's even somewhat ragged from wear. But it was refurbished in atypically luxurious style before communism's fall in 1990. At the very least, it stands out from the common, cheaply-furnished concrete boxes most live in. The kindest of our visitors say ours has more charm than the usually sterile western-style apartments increasingly common in the capital.

That must have registered with the man pressing his pistol against my temple. I instinctively struggled, still trying to realize what was happening. "They're breaking in," I revealed to myself with brilliant insight. "They want to take stuff." Then the hard news. "They've put themselves on the line. They'll hurt you to get what they want."

Stupidly, I continued to struggle. Gun-bearer and I fell to the floor.

"Just shoot him," said cheap-jacket. "Go on, do it."

I managed to crawl into my study with the two men hanging on. I have no idea what I wanted to do. There is a telephone on my desk, but I knew it would be impossible to call anyone. The room also has a window. The apartment is on



My apartment building, built in the middle of last century, survived demolition under the Soviet Union only because there was nowhere to move its inhabitants. Old and crumbling, it nonetheless retains a charm absent from the usual concrete-slab structures in which most Muscovites reside.

a small leafy side street — surely someone would hear glass breaking and yelling.

Defenestrating myself in the hopes of attracting sympathetic bystanders or the police, however, was not an option. Although my apartment is only on the third floor, it is too high up in its high-ceilinged, 19th-century building. A fall would be far too risky. But perhaps, I thought, I could somehow push out one of my callers.

The telephone started ringing. If only I could pick it up! Surely it was Kolya — my dearest friend — ringing back. He could help me, I thought. I had to pick it up — but there was no chance. The noise seemed to scare my attackers, and they redoubled their efforts. They pushed me onto the floor again and into a corner and gun-wielder grasped hard onto my neck. I kicked cheap-jacket.

"Fucker!" he said. "Hold him down. Tie his hands."

I struggled harder. Gun-man began to choke me. I couldn't breathe. I began to see black. The answering machine picked up. "Please leave a message!" my voice said cheerily.

"Pick up, you loser, I know you're there," Kolya said. "Greeeeeg, c'mon. I have to get back to work."

No answer, of course. "Ah, to Hell with you." The line went dead. I noticed my visitors were wearing rubber gloves.

I began to feel I was losing consciousness. The thoughts rushing through my head were strange in that they were so matter-of-fact. I remembered the stories I'd heard about foreigners found dead in their Moscow apartments. Seymour Hersh publicized one episode in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the killing of 35-year-old Michael Dasaro in 1993. Dasaro, like I, was a Harvard graduate. Like I, the Massachusetts native spoke excellent Russian (I had learned from my Russian mother). Dasaro had worked for the U.S. Embassy and the International Finance Corporation before becoming a senior consultant at the accounting firm of Ernst and Young. His body was found in his bathtub by his cleaning woman one weekend after he had apparently suffered a heart attack caused by cardiomyopathy, a rare disease that can become fatal even after a small shock to the body. Dasaro's apartment, located in an old neighborhood very similar and close to mine, had been broken into and ransacked.

There was always much speculation about such deaths. Friends said Dasaro had been trying to buy a car, and that thieves may have been tipped off to the possibility he had a stash of cash at home. Others pointed to the fact that



The apartment's new steel door (on the right), a sure sign of treasures waiting inside. New doors are especially noticeable because public hallways and stairwells of most apartment buildings remain as filthy, smelly and dark as they were during communism.

Dasaro had been rumored to be gay, a real consideration in a country where homosexuality, illegal under Soviet law, remains hated by many. There were also rumors of involvement with Mafia groups. That kind of explanation seemed to ease western minds. "It's his fault," the reasoning went. "He just wasn't careful. It won't happen to me."

But there was never any convincing proof in such cases. The most plausible explanations were usually that thieves had broken in — they'd seen their victims with cash or carrying new stereos into their apartments — and simply resorted to murder in a struggle. It was for that reason I was usually careful not to speak English in the stairwell of my apartment building or on the street nearby.

Aside from the contract killings for which Russia has by now become infamous, there have been many other random murders of foreigners, which had captured my otherwise inoperative mind. I thought of the death of Anthony Riccio, a Brown University junior who was an exchange student in Moscow in 1994. Riccio's strangled body was found where it had fallen outside his dormitory window. The police said the gregarious student had jumped to commit suicide, but friends doubted that. "What if no one ever knows what happened to me?" I kept thinking, keenly aware of the fact that I could easily suffer the same random and senseless fate of others whose deaths had briefly unnerved me.

There was still hope, however. Kolya, who had just slammed down the telephone, had been assaulted on the street several years ago. He'd been beaten and kicked by a gang of leather-clad, so-called "bikers" one evening on Tverskaya Street, Moscow's main drag. His nose had been

broken and he had laid in bed recovering for over a month, barely able to talk. But he'd lived and he was now all right. Other acquaintances of mine had also been robbed over the years, and they, too, had recovered and put the unpleasant events behind them.

I thought of countless incidents elsewhere. I had seen a woman immediately after she had been stabbed on 54th Street in New York. She'd lived. After I moved to Washington, I met few people who hadn't been victims of mugging. One acquaintance had even been shot in the leg near Dupont Circle.

Then anguish set in. Here I was, in my own apartment, where I'd lived peacefully for two years, troubling no one. In my despair, however, I suddenly began to feel hope. My assailants seemed to be becoming less confident. "All we want to do is tie your hands and then we'll let up," growled gun-holder. "Tie his fucking hands!" he commanded cheap-jacket.

"I'm trying, I'm *trying*." I found I was still struggling somehow, despite the fact that I couldn't breathe.

Their hands occupied with me, the men had little chance to look around at the spoils. I began to think of what they wanted to take. Money they could have. There was only about two hundred dollars. The television and stereo — eminently replaceable. But not the laptop! That would be tragic. That's what they'd take first, no doubt. There it was, in the very room in which I was struggling, open on the desk, ready for the taking. Why had I let these men in? Why hadn't I looked through the peephole first? Not only does my computer have all my work, but also years of e-mail correspondence. All that is priceless. I couldn't let them have it.

I began to squeal pitifully. It was all I could muster

since my vocal chords were being squashed by the arms around my neck.

"Just shut the fuck up!" one of the men said. The man choking let up just enough for me to gulp some air. I thought of lying still, letting the men go about their business. But then, what would they do to keep me quiet? I'd seen their faces. Not knowing what to do, I began to struggle harder. Thinking of the two getting their unworthy, grubby, latexed hands on my possessions, I began to grow angry. Sensing the arm around my neck loosen, I began to fight back by again kicking the man trying to hold my arms and legs. He let up a little.

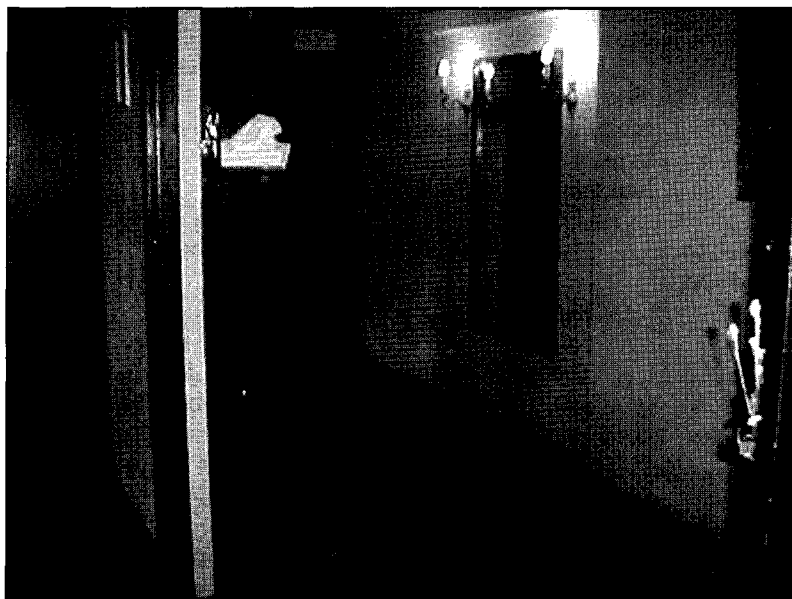
Perceiving hesitation, I began to feel even angrier. I managed to wriggle my hands free. "Get off me!" I yelled after managing to swallow a couple more breaths.

"Shut up!"

"Get off me!"

I suddenly felt I could shake the men off and begin to belt them. I began to picture their bruised faces, and managed to struggle to my knees. Only then did I fully realize for the first time that they had a gun. Was it real, I thought? Is it an air-powered gun — common in Moscow — and would one of its projectiles hurt? But what if it's real? The thought paralyzed me. I could start punching these good-for-nothings, but that would make them frightened for their own well-being, and then they might use the gun.

I managed to stand up and drag myself back into the hallway and tried to get my hands on the main door's latch. One of the men began to punch me in the stomach while the other continued to hold me. It didn't hurt, and I was further emboldened. I dragged the three of us into the living room and we fell onto a sofa.



I had resolved not to hit the men. I'd risked enough already. Then gun-wielder began to choke me again.

"Let go [pant], for crying out loud!" I yelled.

"Don't yell," one of them barked.

"You won't [pant] get away with this, you know," I managed to say. "Everyone knows me. Whatever you do, you'll get it," I said, trying to fend off the arm around my neck. I didn't quite know what I meant by "everyone," but I was hoping the men, who had by now revealed themselves to be pitiful amateurs, would think I meant one of Moscow's myriad Mafia groups. My weapon, which didn't fully reveal itself immediately even to me, was an I'm-more-criminal-than-you-are strategy.

"If you leave now, I won't say anything,"

The apartment's main hallway, where most of the struggle took place.

I said between more panting breaths. "But if you try anything, you'll get it. You can't win. Your best option is to leave." My white shirt was ripped by now and covered with blood stains. I also noticed I was spitting blood onto a white sofa cushion as I spoke. That made my capitalist soul even angrier.

"You'd better leave," I said. They started to choke me again.

"You'll yell if we leave."

"I won't. Just go."

"You'll come after us yelling."

"I won't, I promise," I stuttered between gasps, barely able to speak.

"Okay, we'll leave in five minutes," one man said. "Just stop struggling." I let up. One of the men got up and began to make his way into the hallway and back into the study. I shook off the second man and went after him.

Again with the struggle, the two men trying to hold me down. We fell to the floor.

"Just leave!" I repeated over and over.

"Okay we'll leave," one of them said. "In five minutes."

"No, now. Otherwise you'll get it," I said. "Everyone knows who I am!"

Then came the magic words. "Let's go."

"Okay, okay."

"Go Misha, now!"

"Okay!"

"Now!" I yelled.

"You won't come after us?"

"I promise," I promised. The two got up, scrambled to the door, fumbled with the lock, and left. I got up and slid the door's bolt home.

Inevitable regrets immediately rushed into my head. I should have walloped one of them in the face. I should have pushed them down the stairs. I should have attracted attention somehow.

Nonetheless, I was ecstatic to be alone. I was also amazed. I took off my bloody, ripped shirt. My face ached. I looked in the mirror. I had a big bruise on my cheek and deep cuts on my lip and brow. My hands were shaking. My back was in pain. I picked up the

telephone with shaking hands.

But whom to call? The police are just as corrupt as the criminals. If they were to come to the apartment, they'd have my up-to-date passport and visa information, which might mean they'd come looking for bribes later. The week before, a policeman had stopped me on the street to ask to see my passport. He'd been cruising around for unsuspecting foreigners during the usual crackdown that came on the so-called Chechen day of independence, marking the day rebels chased Russian troops out of Grozny in the first war. The police had been told to be extra hard, one cop had told me confidentially. That was justification for more bribery.

As luck would have it, the agency providing my visa had taken my passport two days earlier to get necessary stamps, and the little chit I was given in the interim had run out. (I was stupid not to have looked — but who expects to be checked randomly during the weekend?) I was threatened with huge fines and a trip to the police station, but after much moralizing lecturing and more threats, the policeman accepted a bribe.

Amid all the talk in Russia and abroad that President Putin is truly engaged in strengthening the state, very few bring up the fact that in order to do so — or rather, in order to create the appearance of doing so to boost his own influence — he must rely on a highly corrupt state apparatus. Bureaucrats from the top deputy ministerial level down were shut out of lucrative and shady privatization deals that took place last decade. With Putin's ascendancy, they feel they can have their revenge and get in on the action. But in abusing his position to take money and then letting me loose to rampage on the streets of Moscow, the policeman who stopped me was actually undermining the recently touted power of the state. That power obviously serves mostly to provide civil servants such as the police with political protection to carry out their nefarious "work."

I called anyway, dialing 02, the Russian equivalent of "911." No answer after ten rings. I dialed again. Another ten rings, then another two, and someone picked up. I briefly told the woman on the other end what had happened.

"They didn't take anything?" she asked.

"No."

"Then why are you calling? Hold on." I heard the sound of a hand covering the mouthpiece on the other end, but could make out, "No I don't want any tea! Bring me some biscuits, though. Hey Natasha, when are we going?" — to lunch, I assumed.

When the woman got back to me and my problem, I talked her into sending over a couple of investigators.

The police, dressed in civilian clothes, looked more sus-

picious than the would-be thieves that had recently come calling. One detective was brusque, short and stout with scars on his face and a crude tattoo, spelling out "Ivan" on his hand. That was a common sign of time spent behind bars. His associate was a stuttering "good cop." A uniformed policeman sporting an automatic rifle also briefly peeked in.

Ivan — whether that was his name or that of a prison friend I didn't ask — immediately demanded coffee. The police asked what had happened, and I told them, but they seemed more interested in my apartment. A gas-powered hot-water heater had captured Ivan's attention.

"You like it?" he asked. "Oh, you have a cat?" he added, spotting feed bowls on the kitchen floor. He eyed the walls and ceiling greedily and ran his grubby hand along one of the kitchen shelves. I imagined what his dirty hole-in-the wall must look like.

Good cop was more professional — at least he talked about police business. "Does this kind of thing happen in America? I heard it does."

After some more small talk — my hands were still shaking and my face bleeding — and a lecture about how I shouldn't open to door to strangers, the police wrote a report. "Caller [meaning me] reported two unidentified men ringing his doorbell. Not knowing who they were, caller telephoned 02 to report them. By the time police arrived, unidentified men had left."

"What?" I asked, after having read the statement (it

was required by law that I do so). "What about the fight? What about the gun?"

"Well, chances are we're not going to find them," said good cop, smiling benignly. "We have to fill a quota of solved crimes, you know how it is. It's a political thing, you understand. Otherwise there'd be all sorts of pressure on us."

I didn't have any energy to protest that these police weren't even making it look like they were doing their jobs. What was the point of dialing "02?" Obviously, like so much officialdom in Russia, it was just show. I thought it enough that the two police weren't demanding bribes. After they left, good cop called back to ask that I tell anyone else who might call from the police department that no one had actually entered my apartment. "Thanks for your cooperation," he offered.

The moral of the story? Don't open the door to strangers in Moscow, I suppose. Although the city is infested with organized criminal groups, it was clear my attackers were free-lancers. They became frightened and figured out a quick buck wasn't worth the trouble. I was lucky. I should probably not have fought with men carrying a pistol — even if it was a fake. Another American, a 49-year-old teacher from Nebraska, wasn't so fortunate. He was stabbed to death in his Moscow apartment the very same day. Police said his assailants had stolen audio and video equipment.

Perhaps most troubling about criminal acts in Russia is that the innocent are rarely avenged. The police never seem to find the guilty, let alone prosecute. Rather, police are guilty themselves — of feeding off those trying to live



as normally as possible. Meanwhile, the criminals are in it with them. Only in Dostoevsky did the guilty ever regret their crimes. In fact, Russia hasn't changed since the 19th century, when *Crime and Punishment's* Raskolnikov brutally murdered an old woman and her daughter in their apartment. Christian love has not triumphed here. But then what has literature to do with reality when it counts? Literature transcends, if only for the author or reader. In reality, people simply die because of others' petty self-interests. And no one cares.

My own run-in — particularly the police response — has reinforced my perception that Russia is a truly lawless state. Every one has to protect himself in a country bordering on outright anarchy. That's ironic, of course, because it is precisely anarchy Putin says he's fighting. Russian history is renowned for its draconian Tsars who executed commoners for blaspheming the country's rulers. The fact is such cases were rare and used for show in a massive state whose bureaucracy could never hope to control the land stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific.

At the same time, Russians have often supported strong dictators because, as one still hears so often here, the worst threat in Russian history has always been anarchy. It's hard to imagine 70 years of communist dictatorship producing any more of the same.

In a never-ending case of vicious circles, shows of force — such as Putin's summer crackdowns — are ever more necessary when overt lawlessness rules, ironically fed by the police supposed to be combating it. Rather than bringing Russia out of its mire, the evidence on the street is that Putin is dragging it backward. That's why some Russians are already gazing back fondly on the Yeltsin years. "Under Yeltsin, we may have been slowly fumbling our way through a thick jungle," a parliamentarian once critical of the former president recently said. "But at least it was in

the right direction. Under Putin, we're building an Autobahn, but it's headed the wrong way."

Although I didn't get to work on my newsletter that unfortunate August day, at least I managed to preserve what I'd already written. After a few stiff shots of vodka to calm my nerves, I sat down to write again — on a topic I hadn't foreseen. It was the closest I'd get to a real police report.

I was still too shaky for swimming the following day, but I returned the morning after, hoping my ordeal (and my bad luck) were over. My fellow swimmers were cordial. The water was relatively warm and actually clean. I felt perhaps I'd been too worked up about Russian lawlessness.

The reason I'd needed a new visa was that my old one was deemed invalid in June, when I tried — unsuccessfully, at least for 24 hours — to board a plane to take me to ICWA's June anniversary and then to my own wedding in New York. I was told the visa's dates did not correspond to stamps in my passport. Protesting about the fact that I had to suffer because of a mistake made by the very people detaining me did nothing. I was able to leave only after finding the right bribe-extorting authorities. (Under Yeltsin's presidency, it had been far easier to buy a last-minute exit visa.) And talk about extortion: the new visa cost \$600, to which had to be added the cost of the bribe to the policeman who nabbed passport-less me on the street. But now I had both, and you can bet I never left the apartment without them, the new visa slipped into the good old passport. Better late than never, as the Russians say too.

I had an almost empty lane for my laps. They eased the pain in my back. I actually felt almost whole again until after my shower, when I discovered my locker door had been broken and my passport stolen. No respite yet — for me or Moscow. □

ICWA Letters (ISSN 1083-4273) are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers by subscription.

Phone: (603) 643-5548 E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net
Fax: (603) 643-9599 Web Site: www.icwa.org

Executive Director: Peter Bird Martin
Program Assistant: Brent Jacobson
Publications Manager: Ellen J. Kozak

©2000 Institute of Current World Affairs, The Crane-Rogers Foundation.
The information contained in this publication may not be reproduced without the writer's permission.

Author: Feifer, Gregory
Title: ICWA Letters -
Europe/Russia
ISSN: 1083-4273
Imprint: Institute of Current World
Affairs, Hanover, NH
Material Type: Serial
Language: English
Frequency: Monthly
Other Regions: East Asia; South Asia;
Mideast/North Africa;
The Americas;
Sub-Saharan Africa

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.