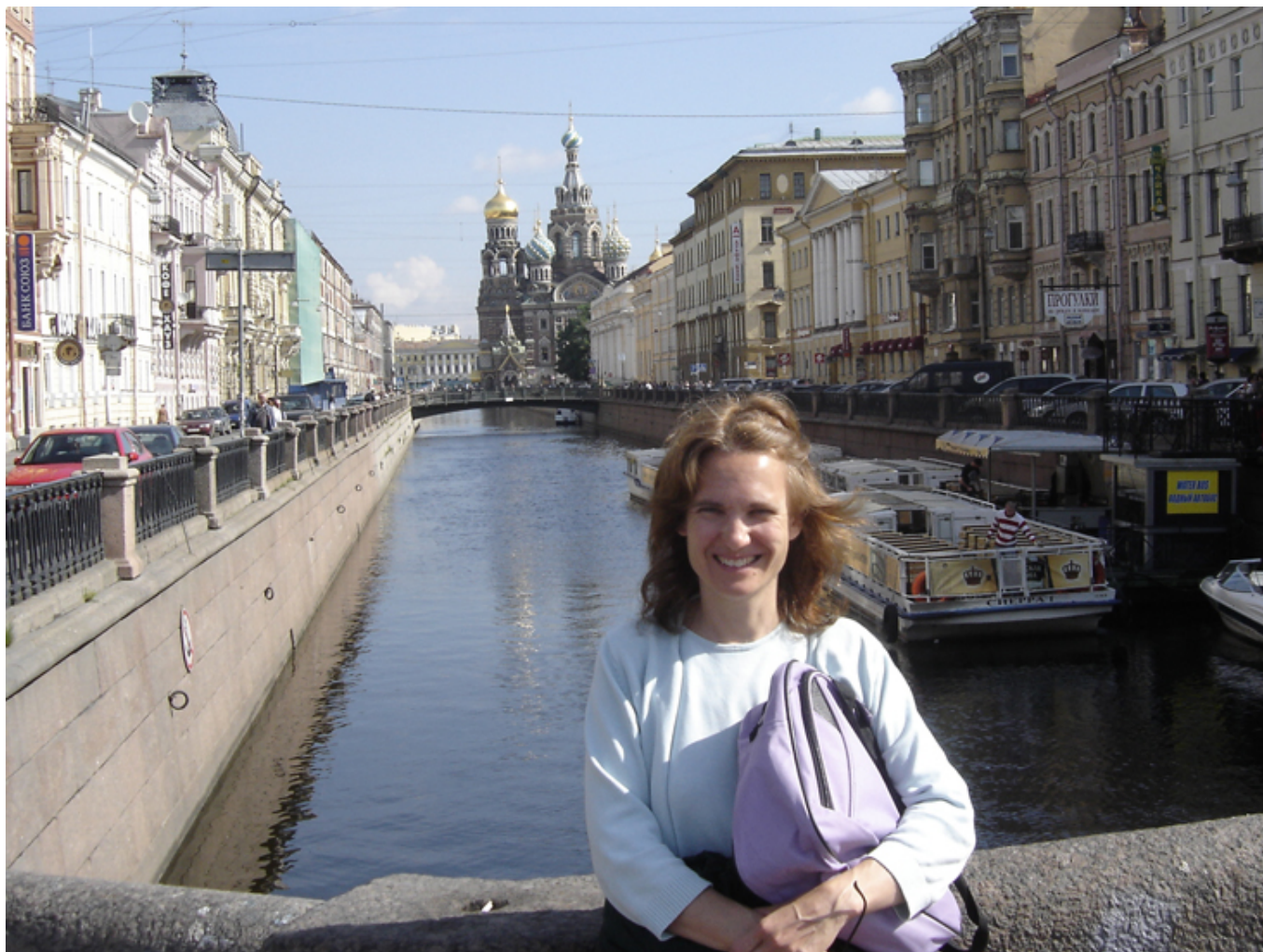




I went to Russia for the International Borzoi Conference and experienced the "white nights" of St Petersburg first hand. This city is so close to the arctic circle that the sun never sets in late June. Broad daylight in the wee hours makes it seem too early to go to bed- and past time to get up. Russia has gone through some huge political upheavals since the Russian Revolution in 1917. I was really surprised that so much of the Romanov architecture and sculpture remained. The Russian people seem currently to be proudly restoring their opulent city. I was told that St. Petersburg's new mayor (a woman) is spending quite a lot on restoration of the outsides of the 18th &19th century buildings - and there was evidence of this everywhere.

Immediately upon arrival, I met up with many old friends in the borzoi world at the get together and welcome Thursday evening. Jean Clare and Jim Sillers had demanded that I go to present my speed/conformation study, so of course they were there along with their spouses Alan and Ann. I also saw the three Sussi's from Sweden (including Susanne Perrson who has Fiddler from my music litter). These girls were always together and always laughing. I also met two new friends Carrie from Australia and Beatrix from Switzerland. There were about 60 or so of other people there as well from all over the world, but I didn't have in depth conversations with all of them. Everyone seemed very happy to be there and came to the conference planning to have fun. I also met Lupa - who was the Russian who coordinated this conference with Jim.

Friday we went to a borzoi specialty dog show. It was supposedly not very far from the hotel but it took anywhere from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours to get there depending on how lost your bus driver got. The show was on an island that had been a vacation spot for the extremely wealthy in the 1800's. It is currently a park, but there was restoration going on at all these huge old summer homes, so I am not sure if some of these are now private homes or businesses. We arrived early. The Russian drove up in small cars packed with 2 - 4 borzoi. Then most people just turned the dogs loose to play with each other while they set up. One bitch jumped in the water entirely -several others had muddy feet. Grooming is definitely a minor point at a Russian dog show.





I was very impressed with the borzoi's dog manners and their obedience, but they were not friendly with strangers. Indeed their owners weren't very friendly with strangers to start with either. I could not ask permission to go over the dogs, so I only got my hands on a few. However, I did get to see about 100 borzoi and there was a lot to like. Overall the type was much better than any borzoi show in any country I have been to. There were mostly very tightly constructed dogs with bladed bone and tiny high set ears.



I was impressed by the large dark almond shaped eyes and beautiful expressions that are so rare elsewhere in the world.





Although there were some dogs with very narrow fronts, steep croups and high tails. I found a dozen or more borzoi I would have been happy to take home. The self red bitch that won BOB was lovely:



The male who won best male is my Zara's litter brother. There were two very nice sons of his at the show, so that is very encouraging for the litter the Schreiber's have planned with Blazer and Zara.



After the western style dog show there was a hunting show where dogs are slowly jogged around the ring for hours. The judge very carefully places the dogs in each class down to the very last dog. I am not clear on what the placements are based on besides general fitness. Here are a few other photos of borzoi that were at the show. I saw every color and pattern except dominant black.









Saturday was an all breed dog show in St. Petersburg, but I decided not to go. I went to Peterhof by boat with Jim & Ann, Doris (US) and Beatrix (Switzerland). Peterhof is a 19th century Romanov summer house and garden that has been maintained as a park and tourist attraction. It was crowded and very beautiful. I could easily imagine borzoi running through the parklands.





Sunday was the first day of the International Borzoi Conference. I was the first speaker, which was largely a disadvantage as they did not have the slide projector up and running. So I had to give my talk without any

visual props except a few handouts. I only brought 20 Russian copies and 40 English copies, so there were not enough to go around. However the translator and I muddled through. A few of the Russian borzoi people got rather angry during my talk. I think it was mostly due to not initially understanding that this was a scientific study and not just my opinion. They did agree with everything the study had to say and indeed reiterated it over and over again with each Russian speaker, but they were very concerned that the study did not go far enough. They were certain that hare feet and shoulder angle also was important to speed. But once they understood the limits of the study, most were enthusiastic about it and wanted me to do another study including Russian borzoi.

Jim Sillers gave a talk on genetics and dog breeding.

Galena Zatova was driven up from Moscow to talk about the standard for the Russian hunting borzoi. She had a dog and bitch with her to point out conformational features on. She is an 86 year old veterinarian and has devoted her whole life and limited resources to borzoi. She is very serious about maintaining the hunting ability and instincts. She did not have a microphone and sat for her presentation, but everyone was totally silent and really listened to her with great respect. The Russian standard is my personal favorite standard and she emphasized many of the same points that were brought up in my speed study. She also emphasized the large eyes and prominent veining in the borzoi head. She likes only minimal coat in a hunting borzoi. It was a real honor to meet with such a legend.

Then we watched some excellent footage of hunting hare and fox with borzoi. Jim bought a copy of the tape, so hopefully it will be for sale in the states in a month or so. The Russian hare is not as fast as our jack rabbit, but more agile. So most of the hunt was very close work and turns, with not as much flat out running.

After that we all went out to dinner. Dinning in St. Petersburg is quite an adventure. The initial suspicion of outsiders is evident even among the waiters. It take a bit of persuasion to convince them you really want to eat there. It takes a while to order and get your courses, but the food was excellent - beautifully presented in a rather French style. I was surprised by how many menus were in both Russian and English. As the days passed I did find a couple of cafeteria style restaurants to eat at when I was in more of a hurry. Russian chocolate is not as good as German chocolate, but I somehow managed to choke it down <Grin>. In my experience the only place in the world with worse food than the US is England and Russia was no exception.

That evening we went on a boat tour of St. Petersburg. The tour guide was excellent and we touched on some Russian history. It seems the city was founded in 1703 by Peter the Great in order to impress the rest of Europe. It is excessively opulent and gives visitors a "wow" response even to this day. The Winter Palace is the size of a small city in itself and it has 22 miles of art on display. Somehow I did not take a picture. But this is the gate and the iron railing.





I also took a picture of the St. Petersburg McDonalds so Gregg could see that he would have been right at home here.



Monday's first speaker was a lovely Russian woman - Susanna Tumanyan. She continued the talk by Galena Zatova on the evolution of borzoi in Russia. It was a fascinating story.

There were several other Russian speakers. There was video of a modern wolf hunt, and more emphasis on continuing to use the borzoi for their original purpose. That evening we all went to a banquet. We all let our hair down and the Americans were trounced by the Russians in a vodka drinking contest. There were some genuine smiles all around. (Russian smiles are very rare.) I think I got much from studying the borzoi in their native land and I agreed more with what I heard at this conference than I have anywhere in all my borzoi travels. We do have only temporary custody of a breed that has been here for centuries.

The next day, most of the conference attendees went on an extensive tour of St. Peterburg. I caught a plane to Stockholm to visit my friend Camilla. Camilla is doing great and has quite a large collection of deerhounds now. Camilla exercised off all the extra calories I got from that Russian food with her short (2 hr) dog walks and her long (5hr) dog walks. The world dog show was that coming weekend, so her house filled up with deerhound people from all over. One girl was a Norwegian also named Ane (pronounced like mine) and she was incredibly funny. I was not aware that Norwegians could be so saucy. I guess all the dull Scandinavians immigrated to America.

The flight home was uneventful except that my suitcase was slashed open and stuff was spilling out when I got it back. The only thing missing (I think) was a shot glass I had bought for Phil as a souvenir. Probably there is also a trail of my dirty socks from Amsterdam to Detroit.

It was a great trip.