

*AN AMERICAN 4-H ADVENTURE*

# *Dozen on the Farm,*



# Soviet Style

By JOHN GARAVENTA

Photographs by  
JAMES TOBIN and  
CAROL SCHMIDT



JAMES TOBIN

**T**HE WORDS to a favorite song rambled uncontrollably through my mind: "I'm your captain. I'm your captain." I, a Connecticut Yankee, fancied that like many New Englanders of the past I was piloting a ship. But this curious ship was no creaking whaler, it was a big Soviet SK4 grain combine, and I steered it over a billowing sea of wheat on the state farm of Urozhay, located in the Soviet Union's Crimean Peninsula, a part of the Ukraine.

Although I hummed the song, I knew in truth I was no captain but merely a deckhand taking a turn at the wheel while my Soviet instructor, Sergei, stood by. Occasionally he adjusted the combine head, keeping the huge machine on an even keel. We charted our route over a wheat field almost two miles long, parched from three rainless weeks in this spur of land that extends into the Black Sea. Instead of the smell of salt air, I breathed wave after wave of dust.

Yet we sailed under threatening skies. By early afternoon the rains finally came, obscuring the sea of wheat. Soon the combine sat motionless in a field too soggy to work. Some of the wheat already cut would be ruined by the moisture, but the farm manager expressed relief, hopeful that the change in weather might improve the harvest of the other crops. As for me, I felt tired

**Person-to-person**, farmers on opposite sides of the planet—and sometimes at opposite ends of the political spectrum—traded views last summer when a dozen young U. S. agriculturalists worked on Soviet farms under a National 4-H Council exchange program. Bearded Stephen Renquist of New York stands atop a milk truck with Ivan Skudny at his home on the Rassvet collective farm in Byelorussia.





WANDA ANDERSON (ABOVE); JAMES TOBIN

"Ivan is better," a tractor driver proclaims in mock triumph as he bests Carol Schmidt, an agricultural-education student from North Dakota, in arm wrestling during a rest break at Rassvet, near Minsk. "Of course he was better at wrestling," says Carol, "but I'd like to take him on in cribbage."

For 12 weeks last summer Carol and her compatriots drove combines, milked cows, shoveled manure, attended an agricultural academy, and skirmished occasionally with bureaucrats.

David McAuley of North Carolina drinks from a water cart (left) during a break from picking apples at the Urozhay farm in the Crimea.

and satisfied, having completed another day on a farm in the U.S.S.R.

On such days in a Soviet wheat field I sometimes shook my head to be sure I was not dreaming, to remind myself that, with 11 other young agricultural specialists from the United States, I was spending the summer of 1978 in the Soviet Union. As part of a 4-H international exchange program we were learning about Soviet agriculture and rural life in a personal way afforded to few other Americans.

During our three-month stay we worked shoulder to shoulder with Soviet citizens on six farms in Byelorussia and in the Ukraine (map, following page), which contains one of the country's most fertile agricultural belts. Our duties ranged from cleaning out cattle stalls to piloting combines. On one farm we experienced the added intimacy of living for two weeks with families.

The experience was often not fun. We were exasperated many times by people's suspicion of us, and we were annoyed by their overbearing efforts to indoctrinate us to the Soviet way of thinking.

Yet we did gain a valuable firsthand look at rural Soviet society, studying in the process how the agricultural industry pursues its immense task of feeding more than 260 million people. Most satisfying of all, we were occasionally able to push away stereotypes and public masks—ours and theirs—and come into real contact with the friendliness and warmth of the Soviet people.

We Americans—nine men and three women—first met in Washington, D. C., where for three months we studied Russian language and culture.

Selected in national competition, we were all in our 20's, and we all either held a degree in some area of agriculture or were working toward one.

Our class was the third to participate in the United States-Soviet Union 4-H exchange program. Begun in 1976, the program was organized in this country by the National 4-H Council, which conducts similar programs with more than forty other nations. It was funded by International Harvester and the International Communication Agency. While we trained in Washington, a dozen agricultural students from the Soviet Union (Continued on page 775)



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ART DIVISION



Passing in waves of barley, combines at the Rassvet farm contribute to the record Soviet grain harvest of 1978—235 million metric tons. The giant collective farm, Byelorussia's largest, sprawls over 9,000 hectares (22,000 acres). Byelorussia's climate reminded the 4-H'ers of the Dakotas; the Crimea suggested coastal California (left).

"Compared to our farms, they're really food factories," says one American. "The workers all specialize. They work regular hours, then go home."

By the dozens the group passed out American farm caps, worn here by a Soviet student (right) and a truck driver (far right), who lends unwitting support to a U. S. farmers' protest.



GARY SCHWARTZ (TOP AND ABOVE)



CAROL SCHMIDT



JAMES SCHESSER

**Courting disaster?** The Americans accepted a casual invitation for a basketball game at the Byelorussian Agricultural Academy in Gorki. They wondered when signs appeared advertising a contest between the academy and the "U.S.A." Then they discovered that their opponents were the academy's varsity team (left, red shirts). The 4-H'ers stand tall (above) after the inevitable defeat, softened by a consolation trophy.

At Saki a Soviet player and his friend sign a volleyball (right) for the Americans after an impromptu game.



CAROL SCHMIDT

were preparing in their country to spend the summer on farms in the United States.

By the time our crash course in Russian had ended, we were able to converse about basic agricultural matters and could stumble through a variety of domestic discussions. We were never more thankful for this training than when we met other Americans in the U.S.S.R. and noticed their helplessness in the simplest of situations.

My favorite example is of one tourist who wanted some bottles of cold wine. Ingeniously removing the label of the vintage he wanted, he demonstrated to the waiter that he wished to have five of this type put into the refrigerator. Thirty minutes later he was presented with five nicely chilled labels.

**I**T WAS EARLY JUNE when we arrived at the town of Gorki in the Republic of Byelorussia. We came as newly enrolled, short-term students at the Byelorussian Agricultural Academy, first opened in 1840 by Tsar Nicholas I. It is now one of the largest such schools in the Soviet Union with 10,000 full- and part-time students, some of them on foreign exchange programs.

As we passed through the town in a bus, Gary Schwartz of South Dakota observed that there were more tractors and horse-drawn wagons on the road than cars. The roads were built with utility, not comfort, in mind; they were quite bumpy. As in many rural towns in the United States, a number of buildings could have used a coat of paint.

The bus deposited our group at the foreign students' dormitory, a modern building that also housed a group from Africa. A young Nigerian walked up to me and shook my hand, saying, "Thanks a lot. Because of your arrival today, the hot water was turned on."

Indeed, we were shown the best face of the academy. Our living quarters were freshly painted, equipped with TV and refrigerator, and set up for sleeping two to a room. Soviet students lived three or four to each sparsely furnished room.

Though we felt we were continually under observation at the school, we at least enjoyed more freedom of movement than most other Americans in the Soviet Union.

We spent two two-week periods at the



JOHN GARAVENTA





*“Now you must come for a little lunch.”*



A “little lunch” turns out to be a caviar and sausage feast (left) for James Schesser at the apartment (right) of a faculty member at the agricultural academy. Later she invited him to her private garden plot to pick strawberries—“some as big as eggs,” he recalls.

The government allows citizens to grow their own crops on plots as large as half a hectare (1¼ acres). On the grounds of the academy, women hoe potatoes (above).



ALL BY JAMES TOBIN



academy, attending formal lectures on the ways of Soviet agriculture and learning how to drive Soviet tractors. Our lessons centered around statistics. We often became disheartened by the constant, ponderous references to production and consumption figures, when we were much more interested in theory and methods.

Toward the end of June we finally moved from the classroom to the farm, all of us as eager as colts sprung from a corral. Our first

stop was for three days of work at the Ulyanovsky swine complex, some 19 kilometers outside Minsk, the capital of Byelorussia. The Soviets like to trumpet the mechanization of their farms, and here we saw a good example of a modern layout.

The complex produces 40,000 hogs a year, all in climate-controlled barns, with one worker for every 1,500 animals. "The entire farm is mechanized," the farm director said proudly as we viewed the operations on closed-circuit television.

Every day a caravan of garbage trucks from Minsk brought forty tons of food scraps collected from schools, hotels, restaurants, and hospitals. The garbage was ground and cooked, supplements were added, and the liquid was pumped to the feeders pneumatically. The hogs seemed to enjoy the liquid feed, and we were told that it speeds their growth, though Americans would probably shudder at the fat content of these animals.

Stringent sanitation controls are needed with this mechanization and with such large numbers of animals. Whenever we entered or left the complex, we were required to take showers; hogs are susceptible to disease that can be brought in on clothes. After four showers a day I began to feel like a raisin.

From our first day on a Soviet farm we became aware of the major difference between a Soviet and a U. S. farmer. When I asked a worker in the garbage-processing plant at Ulyanovsky about the protein content of the feed, he answered, "I don't know. I am only a mechanic. You'll have to ask the feeding specialist."

An American farmer could give you a very good idea of the protein content. He is involved in the entire production cycle. A Soviet farm worker, on the other hand, sticks to one job, like an assembly-line worker. Farm directors say this is easier on the worker and more efficient.

The Soviet farmer also works a regular shift, like a factory employee. I remember the surprise on one Russian's face when James "Jamie" Schesser of Kansas said, "My dad will have us out working in the fields until we can't see our hands in front of our faces because it is so dark."

(The practice would be exhausting in this latitude during summer, because it stays



BOTH BY JAMES TOBIN

"Woman's work," chides a neighbor as Stephen Renquist washes his clothes (facing page) at Rassvet. Here the Americans lived with host families and insisted on doing their own laundry. Nina Skudnaya carries well water (above) for the wash—her house lacks indoor plumbing. When she decided that another 4-H'er had not scrubbed his clothes clean, Nina asked, "Didn't your mother teach you anything?"



light as late as 11 p.m., and the sun rises again at 3:30.)

The principal difference, of course, is that in the U.S.S.R. the state, not the farmer, owns the land, and decisions are governed by the five-year plans handed down by the ministry of agriculture. This probably accounts for the Soviet farmer's seemingly indifferent attitude.

The Soviet Union presently operates 27,000 collective farms, averaging 6,500 hectares each (one hectare equals 2.47 acres), and some 20,000 state farms with a much larger mean size of 18,000 hectares. The only significant administrative difference is that on a state farm, the director is appointed by the government, while a collective's daily affairs are supervised by a manager selected by the farm's general population. On a state farm a worker is guaranteed a certain salary. On a collective the employee earns a share of the communal harvest, though in case of crop failures, a base wage will be given.

Motivation is a chronic problem; bonuses are awarded to encourage workers to exceed production quotas. Finding a buyer is no problem because the government purchases most of the national yield at preset prices.

The system seemed very strange to us, but Soviet planners say that given the huge scale of the agricultural effort and the country's socialist precepts, their way makes sense. Alex Booth of Georgia put it another way: "If you enjoy farming, but not the pressure of decisions and the caprice of the marketplace, come on over. You will not have to worry about paying off any farm loans in lean years. But do not expect any large profits in the good years either."

**T**HE SIGHT of a Soviet farm does not bring to mind many of our usual pastoral images. Driving to our second stop—the Mir state farm outside the town of Baranovichi—our bus topped a hill, and down in a shallow valley we saw to our amazement a double line of 26 massive silos. The complex looked like a factory. Even more surprising was the cluster of modern apartment houses—slablike multistoried flats—where the farmers live.

Mir is a large farm by U. S. standards. The complex is situated on more than 4,000

hectares and is responsible for fattening 11,000 head of cattle. Jim Tobin thought the fields resembled those in his home state of Iowa. "With a little imagination," he said, "I could feel like I was working on my parents' farm—except for the storks. There were several dozen following the silage choppers around the fields." Jim inquired, and found another similarity: In the Soviet Union, too, he was assured, storks are responsible for delivering babies.

Proud of the complex, the farm director informed us that workers earn an average of 180 rubles a month, about \$250. Although this seemed low to us, it is not hard to live on; a state-owned apartment rents for only seven rubles a month.

At Mir we cleaned manure from pens, loaded cattle onto trucks to be slaughtered, fed calves, and harvested hay.

The busiest spot appeared to be in the barn where Olya and Natasha, two of the hardest-working women I've ever met, were in charge of feeding the calves. In a gust of activity they dished out hay and powdered milk to the animals.

When the chores were done, we would show off our family pictures, and then questions and answers would fly. Al Atwood from Kansas could often be found in the barn teaching women how to make macrame plant hangers from hay-baling twine.

In another area Julie Cannell from Illinois paused to write down the recipe for Byelorussian rolls, with each worker adding special advice. The arrival of the farm director propelled everyone back to work, but as soon as he passed, the recipes reappeared. The women laughed at how Julie hurried to work at the sight of the boss.

The most significant incident during our visit to Mir was our own workers' strike. After a week of hard work at the complex, the day arrived when we could bring our cameras to the farm and shoot pictures. Or at least that's what we had been promised.

When we walked into the farm office that morning, all 12 of us wearing cameras, the receptionist insisted on taking our equipment. No negotiating could change her mind. Angry and perplexed, we recalled advice given us in Washington: Don't be rude or arrogant, but stand up for your convictions.

In this spirit, Gary Schwartz firmly



**Cameras *nyet* – work *nyet*.** Refused permission to take pictures at the Mir state farm near Baranovichi, the Americans refuse to work (above). The strike ended when one American spoke by phone to an agricultural official.

Before touring a dairy farm at Rassvet, 4-H'ers don plastic boots (right) as a sanitary precaution.

A Colorado potato beetle (left), potato enemy number one in the Soviet Union, perches on a leaf at Mir. "Our hosts were always joking that the U. S. gave them the beetle," says an American. "We told them Europe gave us their rat."



JAMES TOBIN



CAROL SCHMIDT (TOP AND ABOVE)

Free enterprise lives at the market in Gorki, where women bargain over the price of a pig (below). Farmers gather here to sell livestock and produce from their private plots. A smiling farmer and his wife leave the market for the ride home (right).



announced, "If we can't take cameras, we don't work." At that we all sat on the steps of the office and waited.

The assistant farm manager showed up only to reiterate the ban on cameras and to urge us back to work. Our refusal made him increasingly nervous and frustrated.

Finally Alex Booth asked to speak to the deputy minister of agriculture in Moscow. Handed the phone, he found himself talking instead to a local official in Minsk. Sensing that the Soviets feared that we would make propaganda of our photographs, Alex assured him we were only interested in the positive aspects of the farm.

"OK, you can take in six cameras," said the official. "All or nothing," replied Alex. Silence. "Very well, then," came the resigned answer.

The compromise allowed us only an hour

to photograph all that the farm had to offer, but we felt victorious.

A month later on a farm near Vitebsk we were faced with a similar situation. Told our cameras would be unsanitary, we again voted to strike. Watching us vote, the director remarked kiddingly, "Oh, a democracy!" But our cameras were sterilized under ultraviolet light and returned in half an hour.

Our rides through the Russian countryside provided us with glimpses of agricultural practices centuries apart. Often we spotted rows of silos crowding the skyline and spacious fields crawling with tractors whose tires stood head-high. But in the same neighborhood we might also see a *babushka*—an old woman—herding cattle down a road with a stick, or a man operating a horse-drawn buck rake in a hayfield.

Most of the people we met shared their



BOTH BY CAROL SCHMIDT

government's passion for modernization. They were embarrassed when we noticed a horse and wagon on a dirt road (above). And they would beam with pride at an article of food or apparel that had been store-bought instead of homemade.

One vestige of the agricultural past—and of modern free enterprise—is the private plot. After finishing his normal day's labor, a farmer may develop as much as a half hectare (1¼ acres) on his own; he may keep whatever he grows or sell it at a farmers' market for private profit.

With this incentive, people tend to work harder on these plots than on communal property. Every inch of a private garden is cultivated. We found orchards and livestock pens, potato fields and strawberry patches, flower gardens and beehives. We even saw some healthy stands of marijuana.

(Our guide, seeing our raised eyebrows, dismissed the plants as weeds, saying that fields of hemp once grew in the area.)

The yields from the private plots are spectacular. The plots account for only 3 percent of all land sown in the Soviet Union, yet they produce almost 30 percent of the food.

Some of the best garden produce is raised in the Ukraine, on the Crimean Peninsula where we worked for two weeks. If Byelorussia resembles Iowa, the Crimea looks like the coastal regions of California. Vineyards cover the hills, and a mixture of grainfields and apple and peach orchards spreads across the flatlands.

Known as black-earth country because of the rich soil, the Ukraine supplies a healthy proportion of Soviet fruits and winter wheat. We delighted in the region's warm weather and the easygoing temperament of



its people. Whenever we could steal time off from work in the orchards, we headed to the surf and sun of the Black Sea.

During our first week in the Crimea, we lodged in the city of Simferopol. Mornings would often find us waking at five and picking our way through the streets to the farmers' market. Before our eyes the city would awaken into a carnival of life as farmers arrived with their goods.

Everywhere vendors were calling to buyers to sample the strawberries, tomatoes, apples, and peaches, all grown on private plots. The more perishable the commodity, the higher the price. Raspberries were going for a dollar a pound, peaches fifty cents a

pound, and potatoes only four cents a pound. The best of the produce would not look out of place in a supermarket in the United States.

Nearby, women sold bouquets of bright flowers that the Soviets enjoy so much. Here a man hawked baskets; there, others sold chickens and canaries.

During his wanderings in the market, Steve Renquist of New York located a board listing the price ceilings for each kind of fruit. He took out his camera. Immediately two women started rapping him about the head and shoulders with their umbrellas. "*Nelzya! Nelzya!*—Not allowed! Not allowed!"—they cried. Steve managed to shoot a few pictures, but he was convinced of the Soviet sensitivity to the camera lens.

Incidents in other markets were more pleasant and amusing. One woman offered Carol Schmidt of North Dakota a piece of food (left). She politely took a bite—and discovered the morsel to be fatback.

"Do you eat this at home?" inquired the Russian woman. "Why, no," replied Carol with some discomposure. "Why then, take it all," sweetly rejoined the woman. In such matters, we had been trained, diplomacy supersedes personal taste.

**W**E LEFT the Ukraine in late July and headed back to Byelorussia and the collective farm of Rassvet, near Minsk. Here we would spend our longest stretch on a Soviet farm—two weeks—and for the first time we would be staying with local families.

Two by two we were dropped off at our new homes as the bus passed through Rassvet. Most of us found ourselves in front of one-family frame houses devoid of indoor plumbing, but equipped with telephone and television.

Wanda Anderson of Maine and I were deposited in front of a modern apartment complex. Walking past fragrant flower gardens, we came to a kitchen door where we met Nina Zelenkovets, whom we would come to know as Mom.

Nina was sturdy and had a ready smile. Although she had been cooking all day, her curly light hair was neatly styled and she was wearing a fresh dress. We exchanged greetings in Russian. Not until several days



BOTH BY CAROL SCHMIDT

**Strangers well met:** At the market in Gorki a woman (above) offers fatback and bread, a favorite snack, to Carol Schmidt.

Modest pinups decorate the cab of Sasha (facing page), a Byelorussian combine driver at Rassvet. Racier pictures are seldom seen in Soviet publications.





786

CAROL SCHMIDT



## Growing up on the farm—

Chores for the children are uncommon on Soviet farms except at harvesttime. Then the older ones—like this teenager (**left**) picking apples at Urozhay on the Crimean Peninsula—pitch in to help. During summer vacation there's plenty of time for movies, riding bicycles, and rowing on a Rassvet irrigation pond (**below**). With bows in her hair and a bouquet in her hands, a young girl from Gorki is ready for a weekend picnic (**right**).

Children were eager to exchange *znachki*—souvenir badges—with the Americans. From Vitebsk to the Crimea hundreds of them now wear “Hogs are beautiful” buttons and miniature cloth ears of Iowa corn.



JAMES TOBIN

JULIE CANNELL



later did we learn that she taught English in the local high school.

As the evening passed, we met other members of the family: father Volodya, who managed the farm-machinery garage; daughter Tanya, a high-school student; and daughter Olya, 5 years old, who immediately displayed the family picture album. A son, Sasha, was attending school in Minsk.

Down the lane Jamie Schesser and Alex Booth were also being introduced to family life. Invited by their host to wash up, Jamie and Alex followed him out of the house, through the backyard, past the outhouse and hen coop, through the gate, and out to

the village lake. Then no one moved. The host waited for the guests to go first; the guests waited to see what *he* would do.

Finally the host stripped to his shorts and jumped into the lake, soap in hand. Jamie and Alex looked at each other and followed him in, thus experiencing the first bath with their new father.

Just as in many parts of America, hospitality in the Soviet Union centers around the ritual of eating. Wanda and I sat down with the Zelenkovetses to an enormous meal of cheese, white and dark bread, potatoes, fish, meat cutlets, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, salt pork, raw eggs, lemon drink, wine, and, of course, vodka. We talked about families and our farming backgrounds as much as our language ability would allow. After repeated toasts to friendship, I excused myself and, for the first time in months, went to sleep in a bedroom of my own.

"Ivan, Ivan." The once strange name for John woke me each day. After dressing in the green work uniform worn at Rassvet, I would come downstairs for breakfast.

The Russians have a saying that breakfast is for yourself, never to be missed; lunch is shared with friends and is not as large as breakfast; dinner, a very light meal, is reserved for enemies. After hearing this, I never knew where I stood with Nina, for she tried to stuff me at every meal.

For breakfast Wanda and I usually sat down to mashed potatoes, meat, noodles, fried eggs, and pancakes. "*Kushay—Eat,*" Nina commanded, and we bent to our duty. We knew the other members of our group were receiving the same treatment, for when we met on the bus, most would be shaking their heads and holding their stomachs.



BOTH BY CAROL SCHMIDT

**Wholesome as the land**, Lyuba Korzun wears medals for excellence in milk production at Rassvet (facing page). With her daughter, Ada (above), she prepares dinner. "The meals were huge," says Carol Schmidt. Lyuba's unremitting admonition to her slim houseguest: "Eat. You will gain weight and be more attractive."

**OUT IN THE FIELDS** sooner or later the conversations would turn to politics. "Why do you want war?" some workers asked us, expressing worries about the neutron bomb, and the policies of China and the United States, and Soviet dissidents then on trial in Moscow.

"We don't want war any more than you do," we would reply earnestly. Hearing this, some asked us to report back to America that they didn't want to fight either.

I don't think any beliefs were changed by





these discussions, but at least Soviet and American came away with a more realistic understanding of each other's positions.

Only once were we openly harassed. That occurred at the Saki state farm in the Ukraine, when two Soviet officials accused Steve Renquist and Al Atwood of taking photographs of Soviet planes flying over the farm. Steve and Al vehemently denied the charges and were finally released from interrogation. It seemed that the Soviets wanted to instill a little fear into us.

Otherwise our actions and movements went unimpeded. Throughout our visit we agreed with what one farm director told us: "Agriculture is a most peaceful business. It is a business our countries should deal more in together, because when we are feeding

our people, we can't be doing a greater service to mankind."

At Rassvet, the largest collective farm in Byelorussia, with 9,000 hectares, nine villages, and 1,370 employees, we enjoyed our most fruitful contacts with Soviet workers. Their eyes twinkled when we fumbled and fell through our Russian vocabulary, yet they seemed pleased that we kept trying.

We found men and women alike performing hard manual tasks. Their hands were callused and their handshakes sturdy, just like those of American farmers. Though almost always cautious at first meeting, they soon warmed to us. Workers showed patience at our lack of skill and knowledge whenever we were running an unfamiliar machine or mixing the wrong proportion of



JOHN GARAVENTA



CAROL SCHMIDT (ABOVE AND FACING PAGE)

**Jack-of-all-trades**, Lyuba's husband, Kolya, gets a haircut from his son (facing page). Kolya uses a homemade saw to cut molding (above)—a typical decoration (left) on local farmhouses—for his self-built home. With pride he showed other handmade things—a linen tablecloth, rabbit-fur hats—as well as his own beehives. "Not from the government!" he proclaimed.



feed for dairy cattle. They beamed whenever we rolled up our sleeves and dived into tasks with enthusiasm.

We came to Rassvet during the harvest in a year when the U.S.S.R. produced a record amount of grain—235 million metric tons. One morning we were bused to the wheat fields where a fleet of 15 mammoth red combines stood in a row, ready to race down the fields to fulfill the drivers' quotas.

Red flags waved from some machines, signifying that their operators were ahead in the competition. The winner receives prizes, often cash. While we waited for the foreman's go-ahead shout, Jeff Layman of Ohio and Wanda Anderson joined a group of workers in a card game.

Suddenly the quiet splintered into noise and motion. All hands jumped aboard the combines and the race was on. Swath after

swath, the wheat fell under the blades; row after row, it was swept up into the bellies of the machines. Only breakdowns—which were not uncommon—slowed the pace. By day's end the frenzy of harvest had exhausted everyone.

**S**EVERAL OF OUR GROUP had requested work in their special areas of interest. David McAuley of North Carolina longed for the sounds of a dairy parlor, so he was assigned to live with a dairy farmer. Rising at four in the morning, he operated milking machines that handled 16 cows every eight minutes, a fast pace for an American farmer.

Gary Schwartz also rose early to work in his area, artificial insemination. Each day the milkmaids watched for cows in heat so they could be separated for breeding. Gary

**For cultivating the arts**, each farm complex visited had a Palace of Culture. Not all were as imposing as this one at Rassvet (below), where workers dressed in their best, like first-nighters anywhere, converse before a concert. The building



and his supervisor, Nikolai, impregnated the cows with semen from a U. S. bull. Laughing, Nikolai bestowed a compliment: "Gary, you're doing an excellent job—the cow is smiling!"

On the day before our group left Rassvet, Nikolai approached Gary and said, "I wish you could stay here with me, but of course you can't. But you should feel good that, come spring, you will be the cause of many Soviet calves on this farm."

Such friendships catapulted our morale. We had made a breakthrough. Initially we had not been optimistic. An African student in Gorki had told us: "You don't realize how much these people fear and mistrust you. They want to coexist with you Americans, but not necessarily be your friends."

There was truth to the observation. But from our stay at Rassvet, we discovered that

many common interests exist between Soviet and American people; with time, coexistence can ripen to friendship, just as planting gives way to harvest.

By six o'clock workers had left the fields and barns, and activities shifted to the home and village. We learned quickly that evenings here pass in much the same fashion as they do in an American farm town. After dinner Wanda and I looked at television, engaged in small talk with our host family, or retreated to our rooms to write letters and read. Occasionally Nina and Volodya would take us to a neighbor's house, where in typical Soviet fashion we would walk in the door unannounced and spend the evening visiting.

Other nights Tanya whisked us away to watch a Soviet movie that Wanda and I desperately tried to understand, or to attend a

also contains a restaurant, a museum, the managerial offices, and, in the lobby (right), towering banana trees, a rarity in the U.S.S.R. An agronomist remarked to an American that she had actually eaten one of the bananas.







## *The celebrating lasted three days*

Conviviality reigns following a wedding at Rassvet. While dinner guests applaud, author John Garaventa congratulates the newlyweds (left) after presenting a NASA medallion commemorating Apollo-Soyuz, the American and Soviet craft that met in space in 1975, to the master of ceremonies.

"I thought the celebrating would end after a couple of hours," says photographer Tobin. "Instead it lasted for three days—with breaks for sleep and work."

After a brief civil ceremony the couple touch hands (right). The groom's parents toast them (above) and later exhibit gifts they received from their son and his wife (middle right). An overflow of dancers moves out of the house and into the street (left). "The parents were always bringing more sausage, more bread, more vodka," says Tobin. "It was like Christmas dinner, again and again and again."



ALL BY JAMES TOBIN



concert at the recently built Palace of Culture (pages 792-3). We also went to a local dance, where we witnessed teenagers waltzing to Western rock 'n' roll.

If I found free time before supper, I would go jogging, an activity largely unknown to Soviet farmers, who looked upon it with amusement or perplexity. As I trotted down country lanes and past log cabins, four or five children on bikes would tag along. "Amerikanits?" they asked, as if it were not obvious. "Da, ya Amerikanits," I answered, and then came the barrage of questions about whether I had a dog, mother, father, sisters, brothers, wife, and so forth. A jog in the Soviet Union was never boring.

My exposure to Soviet social life would never be complete, friends told me, until I had attended a country wedding. Luckily one took place on one of our last weekends in the Soviet Union, a three-day marathon of celebration. The event began on a Saturday, when Valentin Skudny of Rassvet invited Jim Tobin and Steve Renquist to photograph the wedding of his son, Alexander (preceding pages).

At the Palace of Weddings the ceremony was performed quickly; they are scheduled every 10 to 15 minutes on the weekends. During the five-minute exchange of vows, Steve noticed that the parents had stayed home to prepare the reception meals. Farm director Vasily Starovoitov told us that the mother of the groom is allowed ten days leave from work, and the father seven, in order to prepare for the celebration. "After all," he explained, "a young man only marries once in his life."

Back to Rassvet came the entourage, horns blaring. On the street of the groom's house, a makeshift table held bread and salt, Russian symbols of good luck. At the bride's house, relatives bundled up her belongings in a sheet and carried them back to the procession. Thus was the bride, Maria, moved out of her home.

The groom's parents met the wedding

party at the gate of their house, where the newlyweds each raised a glass of vodka, drank half, and flung the rest over the shoulder. Alexander then smashed his glass on the ground, and the reception festivities were ready to begin.

The party lasted long into the evening. Inside the house, guests ate and drank. Outside in the street they danced to the music of an accordion and tambourine.

The following day guests arrived at the house for another bout of feasting and jubilation. All during the meal well-wishers paraded gifts to the newlyweds. At our turn Wanda and I presented a medallion made from parts of the Apollo and Soyuz spacecraft, commemorating the first U. S.-U.S.S.R. international space mission.

The master of ceremonies read the Russian and English inscriptions. The entire gathering rose to applaud. I could only feel honored by the reaction to such a small expression of friendship.

On the third day of the wedding I woke with a throbbing head and queasy stomach, victim of numerous toasts to love, family, and fraternity. I vowed to rest, but in early evening Alexander appeared at my door to invite Wanda and me to yet another banquet. I accepted.

Nina, my host mother, looked at me as if she saw a lunatic: "Now, Ivan, don't make the same mistake twice."

As I walked to the party, neighbors who once watched me with question and suspicion came off their porches to shake my hand. I had been elevated to the status of *tovarich*—comrade. I recalled what a Soviet veteran of World War II had told our group in Gorki: "Two mountains will never meet, but people who live on those mountains can meet."

The wedding tables were again filled with food. Laughing, Valentin and his wife, Faina, offered me vodka to cure my ills.

Keeping my promise to Nina, I toasted them with lemonade. □

**Friendliness, a slow-ripening fruit.** Anna Feshuk and Carol Schmidt began the day picking cucumbers at the Saki state farm. Shy and nervous, Anna wondered aloud if "bad things" would be written about the farm. Cucumber for cucumber, Carol matched her work. Finally Anna produced a scarf and smock for Carol. With a hug she says, "Now you look like one of us." JAMES TOBIN

