



FEBRUARY, 2009

It's just a town, a honeymooners' choice
With shady streets, a pleasant mountain spot
And locals greet with sanguinary voice,
"How are ya mate? It sure is bloody hot".

'Tis forty plus degrees, the fifth in row,
Oppressive sun and enervating heat,
As shrivelled leaves and rubbish ever blow
On stirring wind that blusters through the street.

A heavy pall, expectant, shrouds the sky
And worried faces wear a look of doubt.
The radio repeats its warning cry
Activate your fire plan, stay in or get on out.

A whisper of smoke ascends the distant view.
Throughout the town, an all-pervading screech,
The fire siren sends its cadence true
To wrench the hearts of those within its reach.

The gusting gale grows stronger by the hour,
As smell of smoke and fall of burning ash
Give warning of the fire's growing power.
Stay and fight or make a frenzied dash.

The rumble from the forest gathers might.
The water bombers clatter overhead,
And smoke now covers everything in sight;
The sky above takes on a tinge of red.



The residents are frantic to prepare
And pack their treasures into 4x4's.

They open paddock gates, take every
care,
Shut windows, fill up spouts and lock
all doors.

The twinkling orange flash of fire's
fury
Emerges in the valley, near at hand.

Then like the rolling roar of huge ex-
press,
Crescendo-like it thunders cross the
land.



Consuming all with fiendish, noisome glee,
Like banshee, howling bent on razing all,
It swallows, chars, destroys with searing heat
And hurtles on in frenzied search for more.

A chimney stack or two stand lone and grim.
A crumbled heap of ash is all that's left.
Collapsed the corrugated sheets of tin,
A tank, a lone brick wall that stands bereft.

The holocaust has passed and all is still.
A letter box, awry, a silent sentinel,
And blackened trees, denuded, mark the hill
Where once there stood the town of Marysville.

As months pass by the trees will burst away,
The hills resume their vestiges of green,
The rebuilt town will rise from ashes grey,
But grief remains and scars that can't be seen.



© George N. Fordham





Deborah Patterson ~ Principal of Mill Park Heights Primary



I am sitting at my desk Monday morning just before Recess preparing my notes for a staff member who I have to talk to regarding their performance. This will be done at 11.40 am. He shouted abusively at a student last Monday at 9.10 am and as a consequence had the following four days off. He was referred to the Employment Assistance Program which is provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood (DEECD) who offer employees four free counselling sessions. I will discuss his Return to School Plan in the hope of providing support etc. So as you can understand I am feeling tense, angry and apprehensive.

My day begins at 6 am rise and shine, shower and dress. Which suit will I wear today? I then drive to Mac Donalds at around 6.45 am where I order a long black coffee, piece of raisin toast and watch the 7 am news while reading the Herald Sun and Age. I do this about twice a week and on other mornings have breakfast at home with my husband and one son still at home even though he is 28. Once a week I meet with other local Principals for a good coffee and chat. More like a touch base and collegiate support exercise. We need this to keep our morale up and in tune with the day to day changes with the

Department. Plus we have a good old gossip, whinge and pat each other on the back so to speak.

This is my second school as a Principal. I spent nearly seven years as Principal at Templestowe Valley Primary School in the Eastern Region where I thought I had been shot and gone to heaven. It had 160 enrolments when I arrived in April of 1999 and I left in September 2006 it had enrolments of 410. I used to say that out the front of TVPS in Birchwood Avenue, there were five speed humps. Four were made of asphalt and tar and one was me lying on the road. I would do anything to stop traffic if it meant having a new enrolment! Some staff even joked that I hired a plane which flew over Station Pier when the boats from overseas arrived with "Come to Templestowe Valley PS". It was a beautiful school to cut my teeth on and I loved every minute.

However with 410 students and after nearly seven years I got bored and so applied for the Principal position at Mill Park Heights Primary School. With 1,050 students and around 90 staff I wanted a challenge and boy, did I get it! The obvious benefit was that it was only one and a half songs on my car CD from home. Five minutes up the road. Schools begins at 8.45am and finishes at 3.10 pm. I leave around 5pm and go home, change into the dressing gown and cook tea and then watch a bit of television i.e. news, then spent around 1 hour back on the computer finishing off the emails I did not get to during the day. I get around 80 emails per day. I go to bed around 8.30 pm most nights except on Tuesday and Wednesday nights when I play netball. Yes, still at the age of 52 I find time to play my beloved sport.

One tool of the trade that I cannot live without is my mobile phone. I can read my emails with it and it is also a camera. It is on 24 hours a day as I am on call for the Department. I lease my car which helps with the tax issue. I have around 20 suits which take over my part of the wardrobe; my husband's and I have overtaken the spare room wardrobe since my daughter left home. I can hardly wait for my son to get married in 2010 when I take over his wardrobe! My husband wears overalls so he doesn't need as much space as I do. Well that is what I tell him!

I am a grandmother, two children a son 28 and a daughter 23. God only knows how I have managed to remain married to the same man Des for 32 years. We actually went overseas last year for eight weeks and had a ball! Should have done it years ago but we needed to spend some quality time together and it was magic.



I use Google Calendar where the office staff organise my appointments. The entire staff of nearly 92 can view my calendar at anytime. I believe in being open, honest and transparent. The trick is to be careful with inclusions like, Hair Appointment, Eye Brow Wax and Tint, Secret Liaison with ?, only joking, no time in the world for any funny business in Education. It is so incestuous someone is bound to find out!

I don't count my meetings anymore as they continue throughout the week. I meet with my Principal Class Advisory Team every Monday after the big Whole School Assembly with 1.050 students and 200 parents inside our double sized gymnasium. It is a real show with chants, actions, speeches and performances. Mostly from me, hahahah. Students run the meetings and I love them.

I consider myself to be extremely lucky to be able to enjoy my job. I look forward every day to school, the smiles of the student's faces and the unpredictability of the school day etc. I am in the process of organising several projects. The first is a one million Administration and Oval Upgrade and Refurbishment, \$200,000 National Schools Pride Project with extra playground equipment and a two million second campus Redevelopment. My School Resource Package is around \$6 million, 92 staff and 15 staff members on family leave ~ so this is a big job!

So while you are reading this extract sitting back in your arm chair I can only imagine that you don't miss what is happening. Or maybe you do! Retirement is a long way off for me at the moment. Thank you for taking the time to read my very small snapshot of my life as a Principal in 2009.



*Remember when we were principals?
Gosh it was tough!*



Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.

Room service? Send up a larger room.

Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?

Those are my principles. If you don't like them I have others.

He may look like an idiot and talk like an idiot but don't let that fool you. He really is an idiot.

I never forget a face, but in your case I'll be glad to make an exception.

A child of five could understand this. Fetch me a child of five.

From the moment I picked your book up until I laid it down I was convulsed with laughter. Someday I intend reading it.

Ice Water? Get some Onions - that'll make your eyes water!

You know I could rent you out as a decoy for duck hunters?

You've got the brain of a four-year-old boy, and I'll bet he was glad to get rid of it.

A man's only as old as the woman he feels.

Why should I care about posterity? What's posterity ever done for me?

Why, I'd horse-whip you if I had a horse.

Military justice is to justice what military music is to music.

Military intelligence is a contradiction in terms.

One morning I shot an elephant in my pyjamas. How he got into my pyjamas I'll never know.

There is no sweeter sound than the crumbling of your fellow man.

I must say that I find television very educational. The minute somebody turns it on, I go to the library and read a book.

I have had a perfectly wonderful evening, but this wasn't it.

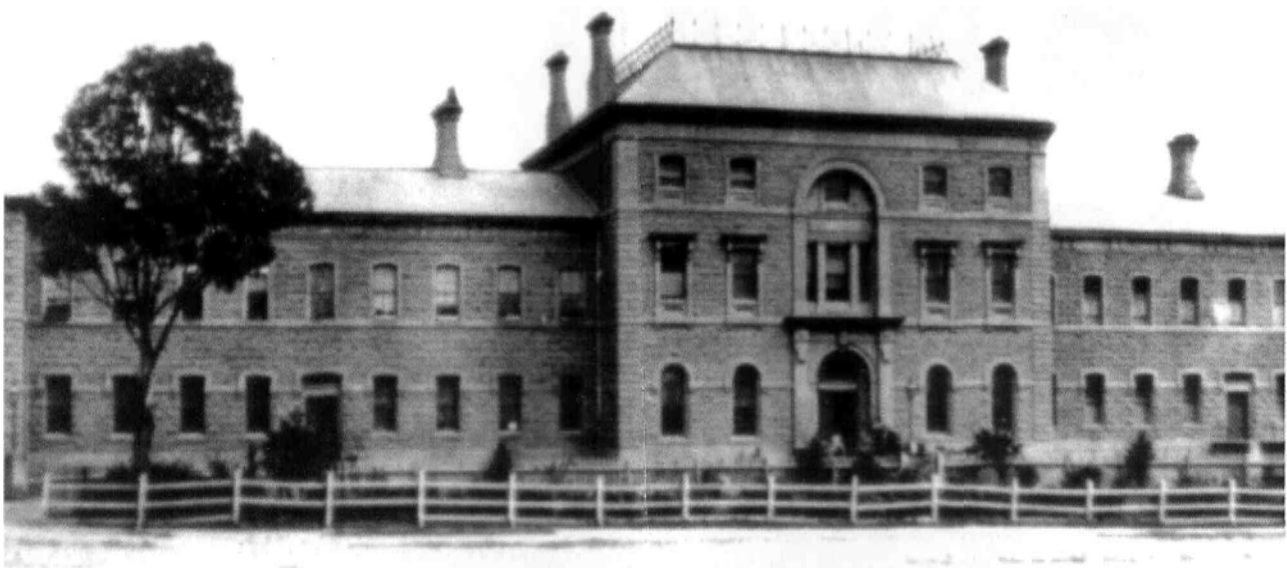
If I held you any closer I would be on the other side of you.

I must confess, I was born at a very early age.



**The last RVPA outing occurred on Wednesday 19th November 2008**

Over 30 members took part in a tour of the historic Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Participants were delighted by the conducted tour of the 7 historic bluestone buildings and the voluntary guides' tales of their important historic functions over a century and a half. The tour was concluded with a superb lunch in the Sergeants' mess. Thanks to John Solomon and Wilf Thorsen for their roles in organising this most successful event.

**HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

There are seven historic bluestone buildings in the Victoria Barracks Melbourne (VBM) precinct. The two earliest were built in the late 1850s by soldiers of 40th Regiment of Foot (2nd Somersetshire) under the supervision of Captain Charles Pasley, Royal Engineer. All bluestone buildings were constructed between 1856 and 1872. The exception is the large extension on the Officer Quarters (A Block New Wing) which was erected in 1917 to cater for the expansion of the Federal Department of Defence during and after World War I (1914-18). The interior of the Officers Quarters (A Block) and the northern extension (A Block New Wing) has been renovated in keeping with the historic nature of the buildings and finishes retained wherever possible.

"Temporary" timber buildings were erected during World War I (1914-18) and World War II (1939-45), but these were demolished in the 1970s and 1980s.

Occupation of Victoria Barracks Melbourne by the military stems from 1856. Decisions regarding the composition of the Australian defence force after Federation were made here at the Barracks. Other decisions affected our role in the Boer War, World Wars I and II, Korea and the Malayan Emergency.

The most significant room in the Barracks is the War Cabinet Room in which the progress of World War II was charted and planned.

The next RVPA outing is to the Peninsula and Somers Camp, a visit highly recommended by Park Shiel.

See and return flier!! See you on Wednesday May 6th 2009!

Retired Victorian Principals Association

**Editor's Note:**

Our member, Joan Hamilton, is not only noted for her most informative and witty after dinner talks / speeches (her allegiance to Collingwood FC notwithstanding) but has also made her mark as a regular columnist / writer for the Herald/ Sun newspaper during the 90's. She never shirked community issues and always fought for Common Sense and fair play and equality. We reprint some of her JUST JOAN pearls in this and future issues.

PAST HAD SOME CLASS

IN THIS decade of — to quote Education Minister Don Hayward — “massive changes in education.” — the powers that be at national level still haven't got their act together when it comes to unification of the education system throughout Australia.

My grandchildren flew back to Karratha on Sunday to prepare for today's start of the Western Australian school year. Their Victorian mates have already been back in harness for a week.

Holiday dates, however, are only one of the minor difficulties that come with a disjointed education system — it's the major difficulties that really concern me.

With more and more of the parent population required to accept interstate work transfers, the losers, currently, are their school-aged children.

They find themselves exchanging a comfortable and secure learning environment and curriculum for a situation in which they not only need to be accepted by a new group of friends, but at the same time must adjust to a set of unfamiliar learning demands.

But if change is still only a question mark on the national education committee's drawing board, when it comes to talking about changes in Victorian schools the Minister's quote is spot on. And during the past few weeks, the media has fed us every last one of them.

Unless you're a Mars resident who has just touched down at Tullamarine, I'd be surprised if you haven't heard about the benefits the "Schools of the Future" will provide and seen the demonstrated concerns of some of those whose lives will be affected.

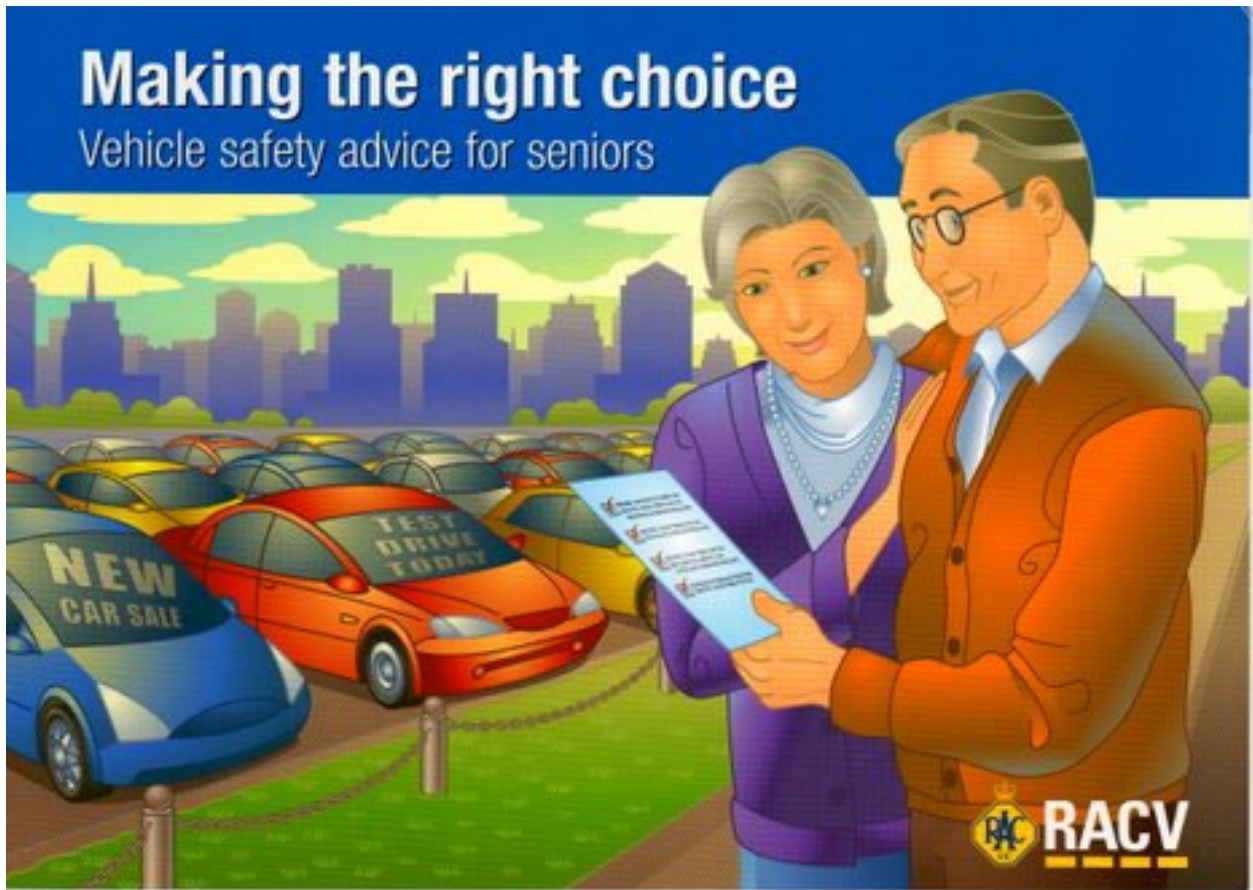
I've worked in the education system long enough to know that a shake-up was well and truly needed and it hasn't come before time.

And if the minister's "Schools of the Future" bring with them, as promised, warm, enthusiastic principals and teachers, along with educational equality, the inevitable heartache and chaos which comes with change will have been worthwhile.

But while the promised schools, curriculum and teaching staff may well be "par excellence", it's not going to be all-round pluses.

Today's children are growing up in schools which provide a Safety House support network along with a Stranger Danger program to safeguard them on their way to and from school. There is also a Protective Behavior program to provide them with strategies to use if abuse enters their lives, an after school extended care program for latchkey children and, as is the case at my local secondary college, free breakfasts for students without parental or home support.

.Makes our "schools of the past" with the fearless '50s and the free milk of the '60s sound pretty good, doesn't it!



Checklist of vehicle safety features

If you are buying a car, the following checklist might be helpful:

Important safety features:

- An above average vehicle safety rating
- Newest car you can afford
- Largest car you are comfortable with
- Airbags - both driver and passenger
- Accessible controls
- Electric mirrors
- Power steering
- Central mounted rear brake light
- Good driver visibility

Other safety features:

- Load limiter seat belts
- Anti-lock (ABS) brakes
- Traction control
- Light colour
- Vehicle turning circle
- Cruise control

Features to avoid:

- Bull bars
- Large 4WDs





A Trip Across Russia and through Eastern Europe, Austria and Italy.

Part I: Russia

Leon Wallis

My 10 week adventure began when I flew out of Melbourne in the late afternoon of the last day in July 2008 on a Singapore Airlines flight bound for Singapore, where I located the designated meeting point at Changi Airport for all 24 members of our travel group travelling with 'The Travel Directors' from Perth, together with our Guide and Trainee Guide, who had all flown in from across Australia. After a couple of hours to get to know each other our group departed just before midnight on the overnight flight to Seoul in South Korea. A 3 hour stopover at the very modern Incheon Airport in full view of the hills crossed by the 38th parallel only 40 km away made me realise how close we were to the troubled North-South Border and what a different world existed just beyond those hills. Just before lunch we boarded our Korean Airlines flight for the 4 hour final leg of our journey to Vladivostok on the Sea of Japan in the Russian Far East arriving in teeming rain to a less than modern airport.

Old Soviet aircraft sitting on the tarmac on high, long legged wheel carriages and looking something like slimmed down versions of 1950's Constellations overshadowed the old buses some distance from our aircraft, to which we had to make a dash in the rain and clamber aboard, with standing room only for many, for the short trip to the terminal. In contrast, after being processed by solemn, unsmiling immigration officials, the Russian guides who met us were thoroughly delightful, modern, attractive young ladies in mini skirts (it was summertime!) who spoke perfect English.

From that point on we realised why we had paid so much money for this trip. For the next 4 weeks travelling across Russia we had excellent local guides stayed in the very best of hotels, ate at the best restaurants, had wonderful entertainment ranging from an evening at the ballet in St Petersburg, numerous musical performances, a night at the theatre with a Cossack Dance group, the Moscow Circus, visits to churches, monasteries, cathedrals, and galleries displaying some of the best art in the world, visits to many of the major museums where so much Russian history, culture and science was on display and visits to most of the well known tourist sights.

After the rain stopped in Vladivostok we had beautiful sunny weather for the next few days to help us enjoy this gem of the Far East. Until the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 this city was closed to all foreigners and most Russians (it is a Russian Naval Base). It is now visited by thousands of tourists, mostly from Japan, China and South Korea. The young people all appeared to be thoroughly modern in their fashionable summer clothes, all speaking English and embracing the opportunities of the new free enterprise Russia. However, many of the vestiges of the Soviet days still remain - the older people feel they have missed out on the benefits of modernization and preferred life under Soviet rule and many of the shops are still quite drab, while streets, parks, gardens and buildings often severely lacked maintenance.

A day trip to the country for lunch at a delightful dacha (a country home) and entertainment by a Russian folk music and dance group was a very





relaxing way to prepare us for our departure the next day on the 9,259 km, 6 days and nights train journey on the Trans Siberian Railway across 7 time zones via Lake Baikal, Irkusk, Novosibirsk, Yeketeringburg and the Ural Mountains to Moscow (the longest train journey in the world).

One must understand that, unlike the Oriental Express or the Indian Pacific which are trains, the Trans Siberian Railway is a railway line (actually a number of lines running side by side) and there are many trains travelling on it ranging from countless goods trains to a luxury private British train. Our group travelled on two of the standard trains, firstly for 3 days/nights to Irkusk where we had a break for a few days then on another train for the 3 day/night leg to Moscow. There were about 20 carriages on each train including a dining car and lounge/bar. Each carriage was divided into compartments each with 4 bunks. There were toilets and washrooms to share at the end of each carriage, but no showers. We stopped at 35 stations along the way, some for only a few minutes, others for up to 30 minutes (naturally, some of these were in the middle of the night). At the longer stops we could do a quick walk into the town, take some photos, buy a few things and hope we didn't get lost (as I did in Yeketeringburg, and arrived back hot, sweaty and red-faced to board the train after they had already raised the carriage steps to leave!) The railway line is electrified the whole way – all 9,259 km of it! We saw hundreds of trains carrying logs, oil, coal, gas, cars, machinery and military equipment. The trains are always punctual to the minute – in fact our Australian guide, who has done the trip many times, promised us all, as we were leaving Vladivostok, a free vodka in Moscow if the train arrived in Moscow more than 5 minutes late – it arrived right on time! Maybe Australia could learn a lot from the Russians on how to run a national railway network!



The journey across Siberia to Lake Baikal and Irkusk clearly showed us the contrast between the isolation and poverty of the eastern half of Russia with its villages of little wooden houses surrounded by gardens full of potatoes, cabbages and stacks of firewood, and the hard life that the people lead with temperatures down to – 30C in the winter time, and the more populated and affluent western half of the country. Any wonder that to be exiled

to Siberia in past times was seen as an extremely harsh punishment, let alone to be sentenced to years of hard labour in the Gulags.

An interesting observation was that, whilst Russians drive on the right-hand side of the road, they import millions of second-hand right-hand drive cars from Japan to drive in the east from Irkusk to Vladivostok (makes for some strange driving practices in the east!), whilst all their vehicles in the western half of the country are left-hand drive.

On arrival in Moscow we quickly became aware that that was where all the money is in Russia (controlled by the oligarchs/criminals, of course!) – a fascinating city, with unbelievable wealth and so much history to absorb: the Kremlin, Red Square, St Basil's Cathedral, the GUM Department Store, the Romanov's 17th century Wooden Palace, and, for us, a visit to Stalin's Wartime Bunker and lunch in his dining room – now an upmarket restaurant for tourists.



A 6 night cruise from Moscow on the 3,500 tonne M/S Russ carrying 282 passengers along the canals and rivers, through locks and across lakes to St Petersburg stopping at many fascinating sights, including the Church of the Transfiguration (built from wood without any nails in 1714) on Kizhi Island in the Onega Lake was a whole adventure in itself.

St Petersburg is simply magnificent, so much wealth, history, art and beautiful buildings – the Peter and Paul Fortress (the central feature being the golden spire of the SS Peter and Paul Cathedral where the remains of Emperor Nicholas II, Empress Alexandra and their 5 children shot in 1918 were reburied in St Catherine's Chapel in 1998), the enormous and beautiful Summer Palace (bombed to ground level by the Germans in WW II and since totally rebuilt), the Hermitage with arguably the best collection of art works in the world and the canals (they call it the Venice of the East!). A short, for us, 4 hour train trip from St Petersburg to Helsinki concluded our trip across Russia.

Whilst we had a very sanitized tour of Russia living a lifestyle that very few Russians can afford and seeing all the wonderful things that they want to show the world, closer study and reading shows Russia to be a very troubled place – corruption, crime, alcoholism, drugs and AIDS are killing the country. They have lost millions of people through wars, purges and famines. The life expectancy of men is 57 years and for women it is 71 years, the population has declined from 220 million a century ago to 140 million today and is expected to drop to 120 million by 2030. Women outnumber men by the millions (which is one reason so many Russian women are seeking western husbands – that SPAM in your email is probably genuine!!). First marriages last on average for 2 years. We saw very few children (they said they send them away to the country for the summer school holidays!!). Factories right across Russia were closed, dilapidated and rusting away. They all disliked Gorbachev intensely but love Putin. The media is muzzled, the judiciary is intimidated and anyone who bucks the system simply disappears or is killed.

On balance, weighing up our wonderful experiences against the downside of all the negatives, I found the ordinary Russian people to be wonderful, friendly, hospitable, lovely people. My feelings towards them left me a little disillusioned and bewildered on the second part of my adventure down through Eastern Europe as I saw the impact that the Soviet Union had on those countries that the Soviet Union swallowed up after the Second World War. (*Part II: Eastern Europe – next Magazine*)



Vladivostok Harbour