

Hanshew journals reveal glimpses of Siberia

Students from Hanshew Middle School and Bear Valley Elementary School kept journals of their trip to Irkutsk, Russia via London and Moscow from March 6-20. The journal project was assigned by Marilyn Balagh, a teacher of Russian at Hanshew, who accompanied the students. Excerpts from the journals give close-up glimpses of their international exchange.

Nick Eraman, seventh-grade

• March 11, 1992

Today we arrived in Irkutsk after a long plane ride on the Russian airline Aeroflot. The ride wasn't as bad as was described by the students that visited earlier. The only thing that worried me was when the engines quit before we took off, but no problems once we got in the air.

Our host families are very kind and I'm embarrassed because they can speak so much English and I can speak almost no Russian.

They say that before Perestroika, the shelves were always full. That the quality was lower, but it was there. Now the stores are empty.

Kelly Hartline, eighth grade

• March 14, 1992

Saturday! Today Natasha and I got up at 10:00 or around that. We had to be at the school to go to Lake Baikal at 10:00. For breakfast, we had ravioli.

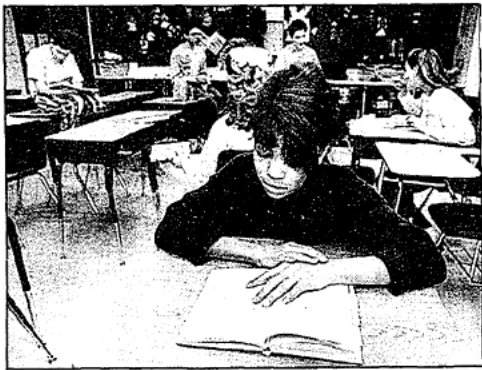
Lake Baikal was cold and beautiful. I think it should be named Sea Baikal. Because it was frozen, you could see all of the way down the ice.

When we returned to the school, there were about 17 boys waiting at the outside basketball court with a basketball for us.

Kimberly Lysogorski, seventh grade

• March 14, 1992

We met at the school at 10:00 to board the bus. Then we drove until we got to a turn in the road. The bus stopped and



Times photo by RUSS KENDALL

Seventh-grader Chelsea Norton of Hanshew Middle School reads her journal of her recent trip to Irkutsk, Russia.

we got out rags to tie on the trees. They were very far and few in the trees. When we finished, we walked up the path and the trees got thicker and thicker. Pretty soon we were on a cliff overlooking the Angara River flowing through a beautiful valley. Ludo said, "tying the rags is an ancient tradition. It means that you will return to Irkutsk in one, 10, 70 or 100 years. And it doesn't matter, you will come back."

We kept driving and then we came to the mouth of the Angara river. It was HUGE!

Ryan Durham, eighth grade

• March 11, 1992

I went to school today. At school there were not very many people because they have shifts in school. At school, we went to a first- (maybe second-) grade Russian class on verbs, a physics class (eleventh-grade), and lunch. In the physics class we were answering questions. Some were "Tell us about life, school, whatever," "How many siblings?" and "How much did the teachers get paid?"

Roshelle Wright, seventh grade

• March 11, 1992

Here I am at my host home.

My host mom is nice but always trying to feed me. Tanya is having trouble with English and I am having trouble with Russian. They like the gifts I gave them.

When we went to school all the cute boys were giving me gifts.

Chelsea Norton, seventh grade

• March 11, 1992

Today we are in school again and in what looks like a fourth- or fifth-grade class. Mrs. Balagh says it sounds like they're learning (language) gender. The teacher made Kelly and Roshelle go up to the front of the class and ask questions. I had to go to the board and write peace in Russian cursive. Then some of the class got in front and sang "If your happy and you know it" in Russian. The bell rang and while we were trying to get out of class people kept giving us gifts!

Rian Brooks, seventh grade

• March 21, 1992

I don't want to come home. Irkutsk is so nice. No enemies, nice people, love everywhere — the perfect life. Irkutsk is a quiet town that is also very homey. This place is a nice place. This

place is a heaven on earth. Irkutsk, a wonderful, beautiful place, is so awesome. I think I'm in love with a whole town. They adopted me, brought me in — and I love them for that.

I really don't want to leave such a pretty place. I know I'll miss this place. I'll miss Yenla. I'll miss everyone. I'm crying inside, busting up. I'm coming back!!! I'm coming back!!!

I'll be back.

Summary. Living in a Russian house:

Living in a Russian house is hard to explain. The first time you walk in you are flooded with emotions of love, happiness, and joy. The house may be small, but it's homey. It gives you a sense of family right away.

Chances are you will end up being waited on day and night by your host mother. Your host mother usually is the most kind and loving person you've ever met. You know you will miss her when you leave.

Your host brothers are usually quiet, but you can change that! Most Russian families play chess so you might want to brush up before you go.

Families have many differences between each other, such as some families go to a Russian Orthodox Church. And another valuable tip is to watch what you say. If you say you like something, then usually your host family will feel obliged to give it to you. You can say you like something, but keep it subtle, say something like nice or neat — not Oh, Cool!! You could end up with a 2,000 ruble painting too big to take home.

Most families are eager to learn about America. Bring some of your favorite tapes. Also when looking at something do it quickly. If you look at it too long your host family will give it to you.

Well, to sum everything up, watch what you say, agree to everything (almost everything), and just lay back and have a good time.