

November 26, 2011

Melissa Conway, Ph.D.
Head Special Collections & Archives
The Eaton Collection
of Science Fiction, Fantasy, etc.
P. O. Box 5900
Riverside CA 92517

Dear Ms. Conway,

When the Wall fell in Berlin, literally, there was a sudden flood of people reaching out to each other over the rubble. East and West - Russian and American - like minded and hopeful to exchange words of Peace and ideas.

Through a page in a Walden Books store magazine, I got the name of Igor A. Toloconnicov. He wished to have American pen pals who were interested in Science Fiction. I wrote to him and we began a correspondence which lasted from October 1989 to December 1993.

It was very interesting and satisfying for both of us. Though we seemingly had not much in common in the beginning, we found that we had much to share. A love of books, family and hopes to learn of each others countries. Igor was the same age as my eldest daughter and worked with a partner, Boris A. Zavgorodny. Igor was married and had a young daughter near the same age as my first grandchild, Rachel.

I started out by writing to him and then started sending him books. He told me "don't worry about duties: books are my bread so to speak."

He and Boris had decided to put on a convention - VolgaCon. much preparation and inviting of authors and work getting it organized. It finally happened, but not before almost being cancelled because of the Coup against Gorbachev, the end of the USSR and the beginnings of the Republic of Russia. It went ahead although some authors came and others did not because of the uncertainty of the political times.

Enclosed are some books that he sent to me. Some packages made it through, others did not for each of us. I am also sending paper memorabilia from VolgaCon as well as Igor's letters. They are written in good English, but a very tiny script - thrifty - to squeeze in as much as possible on both sides of a sheet of paper. So, I have typed out some excerpts to give you an idea of what you will find when you study the letters yourself.

I use the Internet at the library, but usually just to look things up. So I am not a great "techie". I did find some references to VolgaCon. I found Igor's name there but not much. My friend Igor's name is IGOR A. TOLOCONNICOV. There is another similar name.. with no "A." and the last name spelled with a "K" Toloconnikov. He appears to be a young athlete and from the pictures on his website, he has an interest in the ladies.

I think Igor A. Tolconnicov is still in business and would be about age 52. Enclosed also are a few articles from the 'Net written by people who went to VolgaCon.

As our letters continued and our exchange of packages, Igor told me how things were changing drastically for them, and not always for the better. Goods were now available, but prices were soaring. Crime and theft and lack of security in the new Russia that they did not have under Communism were becoming more prevalent. He was still grateful for the books I sent, mostly second hand paperbacks. But they were having problems with the mail as you will see in his letters. He had to work two jobs, one of them out of town and he added a steel door to their apartment to protect his family. There is one letter toward the end of our correspondence that sounds like "Goodbye." He said my letters and books opened a new world to him. Looking back on the letters he sent, I find that he opened his world to me. I could choose books from thousands published each year in SF genre; there, were only a hundred titles published at most in a year.

In 1989, he knew of Heinlein and McCaffrey and Leiber, but had been able to read few or none of their books. He was delighted to read BILLION YEAR SPREE by Aldiss.

The SF encyclopedia I sent he was able to use in his SF & F workshop. Only one woman student, but he hoped to reach out to her and others to show them about US women authors and also their place in SF fiction. He said, "I'm looking forward to hearing from her (McCaffrey after receiving some of her books from me) and it would be quite a honor to hear from a woman who improved so many young minds (as far as I can judge)."

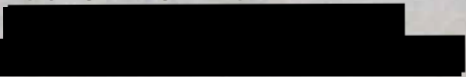
About the books he received he says, "Thank you! It's a breath of a different world while we cope in Stone Age here indeed." To hear this in the early 1990's, to me, this was astounding!

It was a time of great change for the people of Russia. The fall of Communism became as visible as the tearing down of The Wall in Berlin. His interest and mine in SF had indeed crossed the world to open new insights into our two so different countries. Sadly, the changes in his country affected our correspondence, and I did not hear from him after 1993.

However, the items, books and letters that I am sending to you may shine a small light on the history of SF at an interesting point in its expansion across the world. It is my hope that you will find them useful in your studies in the Eaton Collection.

Sincerely yours,

Catherine Clark

Catherine Clark


LETTER EXCERPTS

28 October 1989 (first letter?)

I sent him something, not sure what -- a little too technical? He says his English is not so good, and he can read novels better. He is interested in any books and any condition - SF/F. "Sadly or happily you can choose things out of thousand book titles published in a year; here is only a hundred titles at most!"

8 December 1989

"English certainly confuses me on account of who is speaking to whom. But whatever _____, Catherine is reading science fiction and fantasy and here the woman who has three grown children and is reading SF & F genre is something to wonder/a bout! (a merry chuckle!)"

((I was delighted to read this paragraph! C.C.)) This may have been one of his first letters. We exchanged family info and reading likes and interests. And he mentions authors like Heinlein, but does not know how he .. Heinlein, came to the writing of STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND.

3 February 1990

He received the book ACROSS THE SEA OF SUNS and discusses it. Then another paragraph and his hopes "... while Perestroika lasts." He also talks a bit about a mystery writer Estelman (?) because of his "spiritual relation to Raymond Chandler, one of my favorite mystery writers." "About Josephine Tey and John Dickson Carr I hear from you first." ((in 1990! CC))

"I'm fond of sea novels: Forester, Stanikovich, Conrad.. if it is no trouble or cost send them, and I know something more about the world."

22 March 1990

"yes, I know people who're interested in SF; am known to publishing houses and magazines for mine expertise,... Currently I'm teaching a prolonged SF workshop (since it is a first such here I see my main task in attracting and educating the future foundation for SF in my region to youth."

"Don't worry about duties: books are my bread so to speak..." A paragraph then comes on the plans for VOLGACON, invited authors "' it will be a good pretext to visit my country as all arrangements should be done."

13 April 1990

"received two books by Cherryh, Tepper, and BILLION YEAR SPREE by Aldiss. Now that last I engrossed myself in from the start. What to James Gunn made a textbook case, Mr. Aldiss went out of his way to encompass the whole SF field!"

30 April 1990

"I agree that people meeting and learning about each other is a great fact of tolerance and mutual understanding." He mentions many authors he would like to have, and titles he is interested in. A paragraph about his take on Anne McCaffrey's books which I sent and he read. "I'm looking forward to hearing from her and it would be quite a honor to hear from a woman who improved so many young minds (as far as I can judge)."

— May 1990

"In recent weeks an avalanche of books showered on me..." I was delighted that he was receiving them, and he talks about SF books and hopes their CON will be as good as RANDOM REALITIES. I had sent him some info about that CON. "...intimate enough and big enough to swing out some publications..." ((for his literary agency, I guess CC) About videotapes May 1990, he says ..."I don't see much since our industry only just now starts to produce these commodities, and they are a hell of a price..." He talks about going to a World Con in Holland. "Here we are all - the last year the travel abroad was the furthest thing I could be thought, now it is a grim (the expenditure involved) and exilirating (the taste of real SF millieu involved) reality on the step of my house!"

5 June 1990

Talks about Gorbachev and his problems on being of the old guard but trying to usher in a new age.

25 June 1990

Thanks me for tea and chocolate and books and becoming a "powerful presence in their lives." He did not get to WorldCon in Holland. Bureaucracy and new rules and demands and monetary changes, etc. A paragraph, as a parent, to me (CC) who would know about children and tantrums!

6 July 1990

He got his MA confirmed, a thesis on SF and F theory. Received my books to him and information of RANDOM Con and autographs. ... "thank you very so much!" Also a paragraph about his efforts to get to WORLD CON in Holland and the endless Red Tape involved - no Pun intended! He talks of his SF workshop and is finally getting paid "only one female student - SF being for so long a time a male business with all its technical intricacies. From Western SF & F field I see how much we are missing."

22 August 1990

Igor touched on some theoretical aspects of SF & F He got his MA in Litt. Talks about Customs watchdogs and the bureaucracy of trying to do anything - mail, travel, etc. and participation in CON-FICTION

30 August 1990

I sent him a book autographed by Pohl. He always seems so delighted to get them. At that time, in the US, SF authors autographs seemed easy to get and were not a big deal. He says "Thank you! It's a breath of different world while we cope in Stone Age here indeed." "Other news are that when I was today to P.O. they said the mail line to USA is opened again (within limitations: toys souvenirs, LP records)! I start experimenting immediately."

15 September 1990

"Andre Norton, Pohl Anderson, Marion Zimmer Bradley etc are willing to give this a try. And try I wil!" (his Literary Agency and translations)

10 September 1990

On one hand there had opened many venues unthinkable in past... On the other hand, so many obstacles still left for preventing initiative to go ahead... heavy shortages ... seem to be contrived."

"Your encyclopedia it had arrived! The beautiful quality of this is that it is arranged by theme, and this is outright useful in the workshop..." "You are right, peace brings people together; but at the same time a war rages somewhere...."

2 October 1990

He explains the 'horse logo' for VOLGA CON --Kon which means horse. And trying to get Con up and going. "cigarette riots in Moscow, but imagine people here who had not seen cigarettes her from APRIL!" "No, I have not heard from Anne McCaffrey. Perhaps I write her myself if I meet interest in Tashkent publishers."

2 November 1990

"Miss McCaffrey had not contacted me still but now that I have definite proposals I wrote her direct and just in case mention it to her and tell that there is interest in her Pern series, primarily in adolescent trilogy."

"Yes every package is opened, understandable, the State wants to take its imposed tax off me." "Oh, look for Tolkien's SILMARILLION book, please; there is chance it would be published and I read it to check a translation in our possession."

08-01 (?) 1991

I told him the Nicholls Encyclopedia was coming - he says "looking forward to it. Moreover so that it can put into ~~system my knowledge o~~ per

system my knowledge of Western SF pertinent to Literary Agency functioning." "VOLGACON forges ahead."

They had hoped to have 300 guests, but because of the coup against Gorbachev and the Government in disarray, it went on with considerably less. Many US authors cancelled out.

8 March 1991

A LeGuinn book I sent in January 1990 arrived in February 1991! "Today, 8th March; Women's holiday. My congratulations to all your female part of family: especially of course to you and Rachel." ((My granddaughter Rachel was about the same age as his daughter, little Maria. CC)) At the time it seemed that Women's day was quite a big and important holiday in the USSR.

Mar 20 1991

working hard and travelling more - away from family. I sent him books and he says "now that your Nicholls encyclopedia came! Marvelous treat!" "I really ought to be paid just to be left at home, reading. But such is life -- a perpetual coincillation(?) of opposites (what's this then, a moving force?!)"

3 November 1991

"Thank you very much for the letters. Once in a while parcels arrive with much needed books. The SF encyclopedia were of the invaluable help." He mentions the day of the Coup d'etat. "So VOLGA CON went ahead albeit somehow disorganized" ((Igor himself got a chip off the statue of Dzerjinsky which was pulled down!)) "...achieved major goal of con - personal contact of USSR SF publishers and writers with Western writers and publishers."

letter head Literary agency "BAZIAT"
Boris A Zavgorodny
Igor A. Tolokonnikov

20 Nov 1991

"... that some reporter have found a whole container of foreign mail thrown into gutter..." ((outgoing mail from USSR)) He translates A. Norton and Anderson's books I sent him.

20 February 1992

A new shock for him. His wife went to the store for food - 200 rubles. "...a minimal wage is 345 rubles.. I understand that all my earnings will go into food to keep us sanely afloat." "Mail ... prices skyrocketed and people dropped ~~cor~~responding in favor of keeping maintenance." Prices are rising for him and he assumes it is the same for me. He signs off with the hope that we will get to meet and have "a couple of stories to trade. We'll live and see." The signature closing sounds like GOODBYE.

30 April 1992

I sent him Niven's RINGWORLD series and he received it. ~~He~~ They are planning another VOLVA CON. He says "We'll live and see." He may not get to WORLD CON. In the new state of things, the airlines started to demand dollar payment.. and "that only a couple of years ago it was a criminal offense to possess currency." ((American dollars)) He sent a doll "purported to be a helper for _____, a kind of woodsprite. Recommend RUSALKA by C. J. Cherryh who has it."

24 February 1993

"staying afloat in these trouble times." "Round trip ticket ((to U.S.)) 270 Thousand rubles -- well-to-do family gets 25 thousand monthly nowadays."

PAGE SIX

October 4 1993

"What goals we set before us are marred by politician's bloody games. In general opinion Eltsyn (like Klinton) speaks too much, and subsequently forgets about governing."

4 December 1993

"Certainly have taught us Russians what a delicate balance we are living in." "...huge state is a ponderous animal... Books you send cheer me up considerably. It became something constant in this mad shifting world." "I'm often absent ((from home)) I've rigged a second steel door for Masha ((wife)) to feel herself more secure. That's the feeling which so quickly erodes nowadays."