

Soviets cast spell of intrigue at John Glenn

by Michael Woolsey

A wave of silence passed over a noisy John Glenn sixth-grade classroom as Olga Sverbilva, 17, from the Soviet Union made her entrance. This was to be one of six talks she gave last Thursday to several classes at the middle school in Maplewood.

Initially, many of the students weren't quite sure she was a Soviet. At first glance she looked as if she was from anywhere north of Kansas City, Mo. Well prepared for the Minnesota chill, she was outfitted in a red wool sweater and black knee length skirt. Where she comes from snow and cold are somewhat uncommon. Her hometown, Odessa, is located on the Black Sea in the Ukraine and has a climate comparable to southern Georgia.

After her introduction, the students began a barrage of questions.

"Do you like it here (in the U.S.)?" one student asked eagerly. "Yes, very much," replied Olga.

"Would you want to live here?" blurted another student. She paused, "I like Russia. . . . I miss it very much."

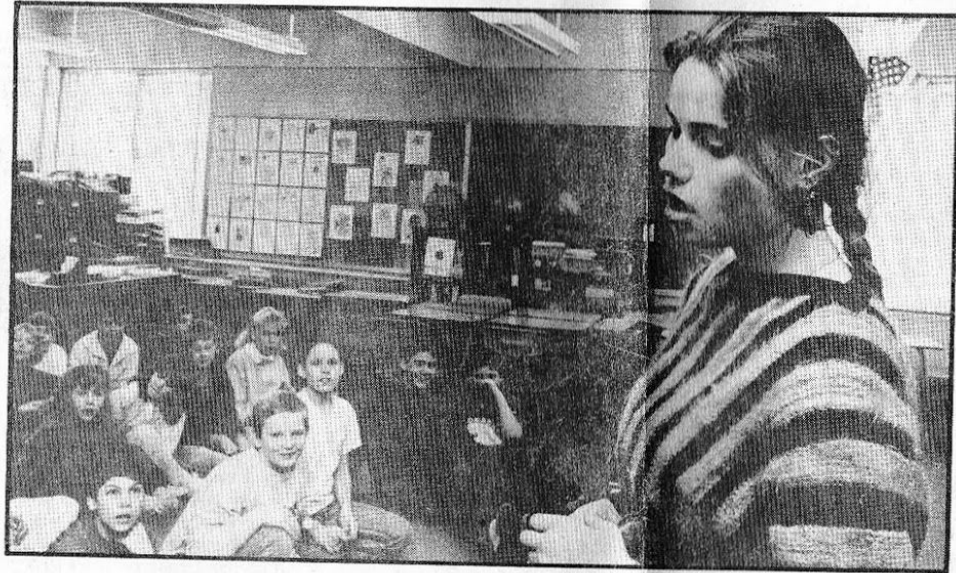
DOWN THE HALL Olga's classmate Mikhail Toruta, 17, was answering questions in a seventh-grade classroom. "What's your favorite American food?" a student asked Mikhail. "I like hot dogs and hamburgers because

we have the same kinds of (similar) food at home," replied the bashful Soviet youth as he jingled pocket change in his faded blue jeans.

Olga and Mikhail are among 30 Odessa students staying with Twin Cities host families for three weeks. Half the students are residing in South St. Paul and attending South St. Paul High School. The others are staying in south Minneapolis. They have approximately 10 years of English instruction from a school that specializes in foreign languages. The students are trained to be translators and tour guides.

The Russian students have been speaking at many area high schools and junior highs about their Soviet culture.

The main goal of this exchange is "to dispel negative stereotypes people in each country may have about the other," states a letter host parents received before the Soviet youths arrived two weeks ago. Olga



OLGA SVERBILVA and Mikhail Toruta of Odessa, a city located in the Ukraine, Soviet Union, made a visit to John Glenn middle school school last Thursday. The visit was arranged by Herb Day, instructor at the school, who has personal ties with the Ukrainian youths. Above, Olga speaks

to an attentive sixth grade class about the differences between Soviet and American life. Below, Mikhail stands before a chalkboard of Russian words while discussing his heritage to students (Review photo by Michael Woolsey).

dances and listening to music, just like American teens. However the Ukrainian youths seem to watch less television. "We don't have 40 or 50 channels of TV like you," stated Mikhail. Olga said she likes to read instead, "I don't think television is useful to be watched all day long," she concluded.

BOTH SOVIETS HAVE an interest in rock and roll music. Olga's favorite American performers include: Michael Jackson, Madonna and Diana Ross. Mikhail prefers Bon Jovi, Guns N' Roses and Metallica. Their Soviet heroes are Peter the Great and Vladimir Lenin, the founder of modern day Russia. They respect several American heroes such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln for his belief in equality among men.

Both Soviet teens stated that some Russian youths have problems with alcohol. "It is among certain groups of people that it is a problem but we have less other drugs (than the United States).

They also pointed out that Russian teenagers aren't allowed to drive until they are 18 years



Communist League will also help secure their future. This organization can in some ways be compared to the Boy Scouts of America but is geared toward politics. It gives teens a chance to be involved in their government. When asked if the Soviet Union may develop a second political party in light of glasnost, Olga answered "Yes, maybe," but she feels indifferent to it. The

thanks. The Ukrainian youths' visit appeared to bring the John Glenn students one step closer to a clearer understanding of their Soviet counterparts. They found out they're not so different after all.