

SOVIET FAMILY CLUBS AND THE RUSSIAN HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT



SHEILA COLE is a journalist and author who has written extensively on questions of human development. She spent one year at Moscow State University on the Soviet-American exchange program where she attended classes at the journalism faculty and worked on *Moscow News*, an English-language Moscow newspaper. She has a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Her articles on Soviet education and child rearing have appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* and in *Psychology Today*. She is currently coauthoring a text on child development.

Summary

There is real interest in the idea of human potential among segments of the Soviet urban middle class. One form this interest has taken is for young families to band together in loosely organized "family clubs." The clubs enable them to cooperate to develop their own potential as human beings by helping to develop the potential of their children. Although the concerns and activities of these young Soviet families grow out of their recent experiences as Soviet citizens, there are many parallels with the human potential movement in the United States. The "family club" movement is encouraged by the Soviet press and, by implication, by the Soviet government, which has also encouraged relations with representatives of the human potential movement in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

From the outside, Soviet society can appear to be monolithic, a place where masses of people live out their lives under the rule of

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a repressive regime. If we stop to think, we realize that among the Soviet masses there are schoolteachers, scientists, artists, factory workers, soldiers, peasants, and bureaucrats, all with their private lives, their dreams, their interests, their heroes, their gossip, and their amusements. But it is usually difficult to imagine their lives in any but the abstract terms of government pronouncements and statistical comparisons printed in our daily newspapers, without any of the details or color that make them human.

On a 1983 trip to Moscow I was offered a rare glimpse into the everyday home life of a vitally important segment of Soviet society, the computer programmers, engineers, scientists, and medical workers who make up that country's technological middle class. To my surprise, I found that my hosts were enthusiastic members of Soviet Russia's human potential movement. Far from constituting a dissident group, these people were adhering to the official ideals of their society to further their purposes. They had turned to family life as the arena in which to promote a better life for themselves and their children.

When I started out I had imagined quite a different experience. My husband and I were returning to Moscow together for the first time in 17 years. On our previous trip, we had brought with us our three-month-old daughter. Her diapers had hung like banners in our tiny dormitory room in Moscow University. We were graduate students then. This time we were traveling as the guests of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. My husband had official work to do in Moscow: seminars to attend, research papers to write, an exchange agreement to negotiate. Ostensibly I was traveling once again, as the visa so nicely phrased it, "in the capacity of a wife," a status that barred me from working in any official capacity.

During my previous visit in the 1960s, American women of my generation were just beginning to worry about child-care arrangements so they could combine family and career. In working out my own predicament as a mother of two and a journalist since then, I have often wondered how my Soviet counterparts were faring. I had published articles about child care and government policy in the United States and I was particularly eager to find out how Soviet programs such as paid maternity leaves and the greater availability of child care affected the quality of their lives and their decisions regarding family and work. I knew it would not be an easy task as a foreigner staying only a short time to find

people willing to talk about their lives or to obtain government statistics that would make such a discussion more than impressionistic. Nevertheless, I was determined to try.

I wrote in advance to my Soviet friends to tell them what I wanted to do and to ask their help. They were more than willing to help, but not in the way I had anticipated. Grabbing at the bits and pieces that they offered, I came up with the answers to many of my questions and to others about the life of young professionals that I had not thought to ask. My quest led me on a circuitous route through family clubs to the Soviet human potential movement and back again to versions of that movement in the United States. This is a record of that journey.

MOSCOW

On our second evening in Moscow, we went to the apartment of some old friends, Volodya and Katia, who had promised to help me arrange interviews. Katia is a senior cultural correspondent on a leading Soviet magazine. She had raised a son while pursuing her own career. She was the person I had most counted on to help arrange interviews. But as we talked I realized that even a person in her position could not arrange for a foreign journalist to have access to people and officials in the Soviet Union. She reviewed the questions I had posed in my letters, puzzling over how I might find proper answers. The conversation didn't get very far. I fell silent and listened to the others talk.

After dinner, we were sitting in Volodya's study, talking and listening to music, when the telephone rang. Volodya took the call in another room. When he came back, he said that it was Joseph Goldin, who was eager to meet us and who could find people for me to talk to. Joseph arrived at about midnight. A short, plumpish man with round, rosy cheeks framed by a black beard, he radiated energy and enthusiasm. He sat down on the floor cross-legged and launched into a long harangue on the *fantastic* things that were happening in the field of communications and the possibilities for transforming human consciousness by means of satellite communication. What, I wondered, did this have to do with women, work, and child rearing? The uncritical enthusiasm with which he talked about his pet projects and his wild mixture of

English and Russian made him seem like a crackpot, an impression only confirmed by his suggestion that I interview women who were planning to give birth to their babies while swimming alongside porpoises.

"We can fly to the Black Sea, Sheila."

I laughed. I did not want to interview women crazy enough to choose a porpoise as a midwife. But that did not stop Joseph. He tried again, describing family clubs that are organized through communication networks and the "happenings" they had staged. This wasn't exactly what I had in mind. But, I said that I found family clubs an appealing possibility.

"Fantastic," Joseph exclaimed in English. "Valery Hiltounen will call you tomorrow at your hotel. Be there in the late morning." I wondered who this Valery Hiltounen might be and what permitted him to call a foreign journalist in her hotel room.

NIKITIN

As promised, a man called late the next morning. If I would meet him at two o'clock at the foot of the Pushkin monument on Gorky Street, he would be glad to tell me all about family clubs, he said.

At precisely two o'clock, a small, elf-like man, about 30, dressed in a checkered sports jacket, came hurrying across the square toward me. It was Valery Hiltounen, senior correspondent for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the national newspaper of the Communist Party's youth organization. He suggested that we go to a nearby ice cream parlor where we could talk.

"Nikitin believes that every child has the potential for genius," Valery began, as he ushered me to a booth in the back.

"Who is Nikitin?" I asked.

"You don't know about Nikitin?" His surprise matched my own. "Boris Pavlovich, his wife Lena Alekseevna? They and their children are the most famous family in our country. "Nikitin is like your Dr. Spock."

"Is he a doctor?"

"No, he's actually an engineer. He was a pilot during the war. But he gives people advice on how to raise their children. Not so much medical advice, but pedagogical," Valery explained.

Over coffee and ice cream he lectured me on the Nikitins' philosophy of child rearing. He seemed to know a great deal about his subject. He talked rapidly in Russian, his voice often rising in excitement. It was all I could do to keep up; I had to take it on faith that eventually what he was telling me would start to make sense.

The Nikitins believe that every child has a potential that, given the right conditions, will blossom forth into genius. It is up to parents to create the right conditions at the right time. There are periods of time in children's lives when they are most receptive to learning particular things. In Nikitin's scheme, age two and a half is the optimal time for a child to learn to read; five-year-olds are ready to begin learning the principles of electricity; eight is the proper age to begin working with concepts in chemistry; and nine the age at which children learn to drive a car easily. If children are ready to learn something but do not have the necessary support and materials, their abilities may decrease and even wither irreversibly, according to Nikitin. Parents must be sensitive to the natural unfolding of their children's potentialities and time their efforts accordingly.

These ideas were not too different from some of those I had heard the day before at the Moscow Institute of Psychology. American developmental psychologists, like their Soviet counterparts, are preoccupied with timing education to fit the developmental characteristics of small children. They also worry about critical periods during which children need particular forms of experience or risk the possibility of damage.

Valery then described some of the remarkable accomplishments of the Nikitins' own children, who range in age from 15 to 28. They have skipped through the normal school curriculum with ease, excelled in tests of physical fitness and endurance, and participated in sports, as well. To help their children develop, the Nikitins created a system of physical training along with numerous mental and physical activities. They also invented a wide variety of educational games that the children play after school at home. These activities encourage the children to use their imaginations, to think for themselves, to play with ideas and with objects they have been learning about. Nikitin believes that play, physical education, and sports are the activities most interesting to children and therefore the most effective means to

learning. He proudly points out that his son, who loved to play with his chemistry set at home making terrible, smelly messes and explosions, had little difficulty mastering chemistry at school. In fact, the major difficulty any of the Nikitin children have had at school was finding the proper grade level. They were far ahead of other children their own age, causing administrative chaos when they had to be advanced several times.

I thought of anxious parents at my children's schools, pushing their children to succeed. I did not find Valery's description very appealing. "Isn't there more to life than academic subjects?" I objected.

"He isn't forcing anything on his children," Valery said. "They love what they are doing. They often stay up late into the night discussing social issues. They have a family workshop where the kids repair things that are broken around the house. Nikitin believes that work is an important part of education. They run barefoot in the snow and they swim in icy rivers."

It sounded slightly loony to me. Valery seemed to read my thought. "We did that once in our family club. Everyone came to look. They thought we were crazy. They said we were killing our children," he said, laughing. "But the Nikitin children don't get as many colds as children who are bundled up."

I was not surprised to hear that most Russians also thought these people were crazy. Their ideas go against the grain of traditional Russian child-rearing practices in which a child's freedom of movement is restrained by warm wraps and hands tightly held by loving elders. In fact, as Valery described Nikitin's educational experiments with his children, they sounded more like the "discovery method" of learning that has been popular in American education during periods of social upheaval such as the 1930s, late 1960s, and early 1970s, than anything Russian.

One important difference between traditional Soviet educational methods and the "discovery method" of education (which still holds sway in most American nursery schools) stems from their different attitudes toward authority. Russian preschoolers, like their American counterparts, can be seen painting, playing with building blocks, and preparing programs of songs and dances for special occasions. But the organization of this activity is very different in the two countries. Most preschool children in

the United States are given paints and paper or turned loose to play and create. Soviet children are given specific assignments and instructions on how to draw or build *correctly*. If they wander from the prescribed procedures they are gently, but firmly, helped back to the “right” path.

The Soviet emphasis on right and wrong answers continues throughout the school years. The official curriculum is designed in research institutes and adopted throughout the country. Whether the topic is mathematics or modern history, there is a correct theory to guide conscientious students to master the correct answers. The efficacy of drill and practice are central to this theory. The Russian saying, “Repetition is the mother of learning,” is believed and practiced in classrooms, music and dance conservatories, and sports complexes everywhere.

This system of authority is not, of course, totally alien to our own system of education, but the thoroughness and uniformity of Soviet top-down control goes beyond the bounds that many Americans would find acceptable. The positive side of this approach is that it fosters a high level of proficiency in well-specified tasks such as mathematics problems or violin playing; the negative side is that it stills a child’s imagination and adventuresomeness, which hurts performance when the tasks are not well specified.

“What do educational experts think of Nikitin?” I asked.

“At first they were against him,” Valery answered. “In the 1950s, when he asked permission to start an experimental school, they turned him down. In 1965, a joint commission of the Medical and Pedagogical Institutes of the Soviet Union criticized Nikitin. The experts said that the Nikitin’s educational experiments with their own children contradicted the theoretical and practical findings of medicine and pedagogy. The Nikitins were also accused of being unsystematic and unscientific. Recently some academics have changed their minds. Their predictions that the Nikitin children would have trouble in school turned out to be wrong. Some academics are even recommending the Nikitins’ system of physical training.

“The Nikitins are receiving wide attention in the national media. They have appeared on national television. They have written columns for newspapers, been interviewed and written about extensively in the media, and have been given permission

to travel all over the country expounding their views. Boris Nikitin's latest book, *Developing Games*, was printed in an edition of 100,000."

FAMILY CLUBS

Valery had been talking for more than an hour, yet he had not said anything about family clubs. When I asked him about the clubs, he was as surprised as he had been when he had discovered I had never heard of the Nikitin family.

"The family clubs are formed so we can raise our children according to Nikitin's advice," Valery explained. "A lot of people come to the Nikitin house to ask Boris and Lena Nikitin's advice. These people want to use Nikitin's methods with their own children. But it takes a lot of time, and building the gymnastic equipment or the special toys is not easy. Nikitin told them to get together and help each other do it. He's the one who started the family clubs."

I asked if I could be introduced to some family club members. Valery promised to arrange a meeting.

Valery called the next evening to say that he would come by for me in an hour. He had invited some family club members to meet me. In the metro on the way to his house, Valery told me that the first family clubs had begun in the large cities of the European part of the U.S.S.R. Now there are clubs all over the country, with especially active groups in the new cities dedicated to science. Some clubs are formally organized, others are informal, depending on the desires of their members. Each club pursues topics and projects of its own choosing. He told me about some clubs with pyramid structures in which there is a president and managers; every manager has five families for which he or she is responsible. Others are simply networks of people who arrange get-togethers by telephone. In Puschino, a scientific community outside of Moscow, family club members get together for physical exercise in the town square every morning.

Family clubs form, dissolve, and re-form as people feel the need to get together to build equipment that the Nikitins recommend, to discuss child rearing, or to plan joint projects. Their membership changes depending on the activity. The clubs

keep in touch with each other through Boris Nikitin. This widely scattered, unofficial, network of people who exchange information about educational experiments, books, lectures, and related events operates without the benefit of a newsletter or journal. Reflecting on my own organizing efforts in my community, I asked why there was no family club newsletter.

"It's impossible," Valery replied. "There's a paper shortage in this country. Our country cannot afford for every separate group to have its own newsletter."

It was a disingenuous answer. In Russia, the availability of paper is a mode of social control. Many different groups, such as stamp collectors, do have little journals or newsletters of their own. The issue is which groups are allowed to communicate in print and which are not. Because Nikitin's ideas are widely disseminated through the Soviet media and Valery Hiltounen has been permitted to use the pages of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* to tell its millions of readers about family clubs, the lack of available paper cannot directly be attributed to official disapproval of family club activities. Perhaps the very informal nature of the groups precluded them from gaining access to the necessary paper and duplicating services.

The family club in which Valery Hiltounen is active was organized several years ago. At first, people met in each other's apartments to talk. But so many people were interested in joining the discussions that they moved their meetings to the very ice cream parlor we had been in the day before. The patrons soon complained that the group was too noisy. They were asked to leave.

One member took it upon herself to find the club a permanent meeting place. She went around to "Dom Kulturi" (houses of culture), as community centers are called, to ask their directors if the group could meet there. She was turned down about a dozen times before finding a director who agreed.

Our conversation came to a halt as we reached the last stop on the metro line. The Hiltounens live in an area of Moscow that was outside the city when we were there 17 years ago. Now it is an area of raw-looking, prefabricated, concrete apartment buildings set down on muddy fields that are gradually being turned into wide thoroughfares lined with shops and schools. We cut across a children's playground at the end of the street. As we approached Valery's building, three children, dressed only in underpants,

although it was cool enough for sweaters, interrupted their digging in the mud to run and throw themselves at Valery in greeting. The eldest, a boy of about six, affectionately took Valery's hand and walked with us to the stairs, chattering on about some game they were playing, before running off again.

These were the children of Lena and Serge Kuzmenko, members of a Leningrad family club. Valery's own family was on vacation on the Black Sea. The Kuzmenkos and Hiltounens had become friends when members of Valery's family club had gone to Leningrad to visit the Kuzmenko's family club and see the city. The Kuzmenkos were in Moscow so that Lena could give birth to their fourth child in a clinic that would allow her to breast-feed the newborn baby immediately after birth.

Most Soviet maternity clinics separate newborns from their mothers after birth, and keep them apart for two days until the mother's milk comes in, Valery explained. Lena had read that the fluid that the breast secretes for the first few days after a woman gives birth, colostrum, provides the newborn with immunities. She also believed that it was emotionally better for her and the baby if they were allowed to have contact after birth. She had heard of the Moscow clinic from other family club members.

The entry hall of the Hiltounens' second-floor apartment, filled with evidence of a family living in tight quarters, brought to mind the nine years I had spent with two young kids in New York City apartments. Bikes, trikes, and other wheeled toys crowded against one wall. Children's sweaters hung on hooks on the wall near the door. Underneath was a box filled with galoshes and other footwear. Children's art decorated another wall. The traditional drab wallpaper that comes with many Moscow apartments was covered by a mural the children had painted in bright primary colors with the help of an artist friend. We took off our shoes and went into the kitchen. Lena, a pert, dark-haired woman who is about 30 years old, was standing at the sink. She was very pregnant. Her husband, Sergei, a dark-haired man with a charming gap-toothed grin, was at the sideboard slicing bread.

No sooner were we introduced than Valery whisked me off on a tour of his home. The apartment has four rooms in addition to the kitchen, bathroom, and hallway. It is very large by Moscow standards. One room is used as a living room, and another as a combination study-bedroom for Valery and his wife, which leaves

two rooms for their three children. The children's rooms were furnished with attractive Scandinavian modular-type furniture. I admired the children's rooms. Valery commented wryly that the kids had preferred to sleep out on the terrace all spring. I looked out, and sure enough, there were a couple of mats and toys.

In one of the children's rooms a large gymnastic apparatus, complete with bars and rings, filled the floor space. Valery is proud of the apparatus; it is like one that the Nikitins recommend. He is proud too of his son, Denis, who uses it expertly. Denis has even learned to do yoga, he told me, pulling a pile of photographs out of a drawer. On top was a photograph of the boy with his legs wrapped around his neck.

"He is teaching the rest of us yoga," Valery said. He then showed me photographs of his family participating in various family club activities.

By this time another couple, Vera Kuleshov, a court clerk, and her husband, Georgy, a medic at a first aid station, had arrived. They were immediately followed by Vera Antonova, an engineer, and her teenage daughter, Ulyana, a paramedical student. With eleven for dinner, I quickly got a feel for family club life.

Two things immediately struck me about the group. The first was their education. Except for Valery, who is a graduate of Moscow State University, everyone had technical training. In the Soviet Union, engineers do not go to university but are trained at engineering institutes instead. There were no intellectuals or workers present. (The Kuzmenkos were both trained as engineers, Sergei in electrical engineering and Lena in chemical engineering.) The second noticeable characteristic was their appearance. No one was fat or had gold teeth. We all congregated in the kitchen where we helped Lena and Sergei put supper on the table. The good-humored banter, the husbands helping, and the kids running around in the hallway while the grownups talked in the kitchen as they prepared food, were all so familiar that I might have been at home with some of the younger people who work with my husband, except that we were speaking Russian. Dinner consisted of cheeses, bread, cucumbers, a soybean stew, cake, and tea. It is a remarkable meal for such a Russian gathering because there was neither fish, meat, nor alcohol on the table. It is almost unheard of for Russians to come together without sharing at least a bottle of wine, but preferably

something “strong” to drink. The Hiltounens do not serve alcoholic beverages in their home.

“Is alcohol forbidden in family clubs?” I asked.

Valery shook his head. “It’s not a question of forbidding anything. There are family club members who do not drink, or who become vegetarians, or who practice yoga exercises. But these are personal choices. Family clubs exist only as a way to help each other carry out Nikitin’s educational principles in our own families.”

Being a nonjoiner, I immediately wanted to know why they needed to form clubs to do that.

“Well, there’s the question of the gymnastic equipment. It’s hard to build by yourself, so people help each other with it,” he began. At that moment our attention was diverted. Vera Antonova was telling the Kuleshovs about the wonderful time the teenage boys in the club were having sleeping on top of the stove at the old house they were helping to restore. “Just like real, old Russians,” she said. Their club was restoring four old peasant dwellings in a village 300 kilometers from Moscow on the Volga River. The district commissioner had given them permission to restore the abandoned houses for use as summer cabins. “We can have as many more as we want,” Valery added. “There are hundreds of abandoned houses in that region.”

“The clubs are built around such projects,” Lena Kuzmenko explained. “We have special courses, lectures, and seminars for parents. We go camping together. We take trips together.”

I remembered Joseph’s enthusiasm about a “happening” in Leningrad. What was that about, I asked, using the English word. There was a moment of incomprehension, then Lena Kuzmenko, who speaks some English, said, “Oh, you mean the Pinnochio centenary!”

She told me how one member of a Leningrad family club, a mathematician who loves the theater, had an idea for a carnival to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Adventures of Pinnochio*. He and the members of his club approached the Leningrad Puppet Theater and the Children’s Theater. The theater people liked the idea and agreed to participate. The children worked on the project, too. Parents helped with the children’s costumes, but they were not allowed to attend. The theater was too small. The only adults present were the performers and the set designers.

This reminded Valery of his favorite project. After reading a newspaper story about the remarkable school for blind-deaf children in Zagorsk, which is close to Moscow, Valery contacted the director. He offered the help of their family club, if there was any work that needed doing. The director told them he was having difficulty getting the construction crews to complete the school's heating system. Cold weather had set in and the children were experiencing hardships. There had been several delays. On a Friday evening, 20 families from Valery's club, carrying their own sleeping bags and cribs, took the train to Zagorsk. A local agricultural technical school permitted them to camp out in its modest facilities. On Saturday they dug the ditch for the heating pipe in the frozen ground while their children played in the woods nearby. They also managed to paint the school's fence and fix up the greenhouse. After the children had gone to bed, the parents gathered for their usual discussions on how to rear their children better and improve the quality of their lives.

Valery later wrote about this project in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (Sept. 24, 1980). He offered to use the newspaper as a communications center for others who were interested in forming their own family clubs. He was deluged with calls of people who wanted to start their own family clubs and wrote another story telling them how. With his access to the readers of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Valery obviously is in a key position in the family club network.

We sat down to eat. Now the questions began in earnest. It was by no means a one-sided affair. My hosts were as curious about me and everyday life in the United States as I was about them. The first topic of conversation was education. Some of them were uncomfortable with Boris Nikitin's suggestion that children who have mastered the subjects in the standard school curriculum should skip to the next grade so that they would not "stagnate" intellectually. What did I think?

I told them that when I had been faced with such a choice I had decided against having the child skipped ahead. My son may have been advanced in mathematics, but he was still a nine-year-old, and not a socially mature one. Now, several years later, I regret not having found some way for him both to stay with other children his own age and still pursue his bent for mathematics.

We discussed the issue from several points of view. While I saw the problem as one of trying to balance children's intellectual

development with the growth of their personality, and social and physical skills, they saw the dilemma in other terms. They were afraid that educating their children at home would bring them into conflict with the schools. Finally Lena suggested a solution that avoided such problems: "There is a whole world of knowledge that the school does not teach them about. I see no need for bringing children into conflict with the school by teaching them at home the same things they will learn at school."

Health care was next. What did I think of faith healing, of laying on of hands? The questions came from Vera Antonova. I confessed that I knew little about such matters. I dislike most medical practices, but I have little faith in most of the alternatives that I know about.

"I have these terrible migraine headaches. I've been to several doctors and none have been able to help," Vera Antonova said. "Someone told me about this woman who can cure by putting her hands on you, so I tried that. It helped." She wanted to know if in the United States people like her (by which I think she meant educated, middle-class people) believe in such things, in acupuncture, herbal medicine.

I told her that some of my friends had used alternative medical practitioners, especially when official medicine had been unable to help them. This led to a heated discussion in which many of the others sitting at the table confessed that they are interested in nontraditional healing. They believe traditional medicine has severe limitations. Georgy Kuleshov, who is trained in traditional medicine, gently disagreed. He good-humoredly questioned them, trying to get them to confess to contradictions in what they were saying. But his appeals to logic and scientific evidence had little effect.

Lena, with her chair pushed back from the table to make room for her pregnant belly, complained about the obstetrical care in Soviet clinics. The other women joined in with their stories and complaints. It was a familiar litany, variations of which I have heard many times before in the United States.

"Is anyone doing anything to change the situation," I asked.

"Some places are changing. That is why I came to this clinic in Moscow," Lena said.

I asked her if the people in family clubs were putting any pressure on the medical establishment to change some of the ways that they handled childbirth. She did not seem to under-

stand what I meant. I tried to rephrase my question: Sometimes people find that living their private lives in what they think is the right way inadvertently brings them into conflict with the established way of doing things. If they want to continue, they must either find some way around the establishment or they must put pressure on the system to change. As an example, I talked of women's desire to have some say in how they gave birth in the United States, how that had led to conflict with the medical establishment, and as a result of public pressure through the media, there had been some changes in the practice of obstetrics. There was still no response. I tried another example without any success. Either the idea of putting public pressure on institutions such as obstetric clinics to become more receptive to the needs of the people they served was too foreign and could not be translated into any terms that were meaningful to them, or they did not wish to let the conversation slide into such a groove. I tried to ask the same question in several guises during the course of the evening with no greater success. I was meeting with the customary silence and evasions that Russians offer when they are being forced to confront something that they consider unpleasant. I did not learn the answer to my questions until later, and then not through anything that anyone said, but rather, by what they did.

To change the topic, Valery asked me if I thought it was possible to be my children's friend. I told them that I did not think so. The difference in power and authority between children and parents precluded friendship and was almost inevitably a source of conflict as children struggled to become independent. I told them about the psychological battering that I have been taking from my teenagers, which is in many ways reminiscent of the conflict I had with my parents when I was their age. My skeptical

will become skeptical about them, their abilities and beliefs.”

“That doesn’t need to happen,” Valery interrupted her. “If they see that other people in the club respect them, the children will, too.”

“But what if other people in the group don’t respect them and the children can see that?” Vera Antonovna persisted.

Valery denied that such a thing could happen in a family club. “If you create the proper ecology of relations between people,” he said, “anyone can become someone that the others respect.” But the women’s laughter and asides made it clear that Valery was choosing to idealize life in family clubs; occasionally there are members whom others do not respect and their feelings become evident to the children.

Because Lena Kuzmenko and Vera Kuleshov live with their mothers in their households, the conversation about conflict between generations shifted its focus. Lena’s mother, who works in construction, thoroughly approves of family club activities and participates in them. Vera said that although her mother approved of their family club on the whole, she thought some of the things they did with their children were strange and tried to change things to suit her notions of proper upbringing.

“What happens then?”

Vera laughed and shrugged. “Sometimes I explain and she understands, so we do it the way I think it should be done. Sometimes I give in and babushka does it her way.”

Valery reiterated his belief that conflict between generations was not inevitable or necessary. He argued hard. The problem really seemed to be bothering him.

I have thought about his insistence a lot since then. The family clubs are formed expressly for the purpose of transforming children and parents, physically and mentally. Transformation means change, and change often entails some conflict with the old. Yet, as was evident in their comments about skipping their children in school and their refusal to discuss my questions about how they handled their differences with such institutions as obstetric clinics, these family club members did not want to embark on any course of action that would lead them to challenge authority directly. That may have been why he was so insistent that it was not necessary. But Valery also seemed to be worried that once he has helped his children to realize their genius and become “new,” different kinds of people, people that he cannot

become because many of his abilities have “irreversibly withered,” they will reject him as part of the old. That is a problem I, the child of immigrant parents, could understand perfectly well.

WOMEN, WORK, AND CHILDREN

The conversation around the Hiltounen’s kitchen table shifted to some of the questions I had been interested in when I arrived. How did these women, all of whom were working and raising children, manage to combine the two?

They told me that the law granting women a partially paid child-care leave for up to one year after the birth of a child had just gone into effect in the Soviet Union. The leave can be extended without pay until the child is 18 months old without losing job security, seniority, or pension rights. Although Lena would be able to take advantage of these benefits with her new offspring, she, the two Veras, and Valery’s wife had had to manage without such benefits previously.

I had gone through a difficult period when I was trying to piece together a career and child rearing in my own, more affluent, country, I said. In fact, the difficulties had led me to stop working on a daily newspaper and to become a freelancer. The career switch was costly. My income was reduced. I lost the pension rights and job benefits that had gone with working for a newspaper. I was also isolated from others in my profession. How had they managed the period when their children were babies? Had they sent them to creches, 24-hour-a-day, five-day-a-week facilities for infants? Had their mothers quit work to stay home with their children? Or had they simply stopped working when their children were infants? And could they afford to do that?

The women had no difficulty understanding these questions. They nodded their heads, sighed, and then smiled knowingly at one another as I was speaking. “No matter how you work it out, it’s a problem,” Vera Antonova said. “It’s hard when you have little ones.”

“When my children were little I worked in menial jobs in order to have less responsibility at work,” Vera Kuleshov confessed. “I worked in the post office, in preschools, anywhere where there wasn’t much pressure and I could have more time to devote to my family.”

Lena laughed in recognition. She had stopped working as a chemical engineer to become a nursery school teacher both because she wanted to assure her children entrance to a good nursery school (staff members' children are skipped to the head of long waiting lists for such facilities), and because the job had shorter hours and less responsibility. Nursery school teachers earn less than street sweepers in the Soviet Union, while chemical engineers make almost double the wages of those who work with preschoolers.

Valery said that his wife had stopped teaching school and began to work as a freelance writer for the same reasons. "And even then, it was hard. There was a terrible time when both of my wife's parents were dying, one in a hospital on one side of Moscow, and the other in a hospital all the way across town. We had to travel back and forth between the two hospitals every day after work. We simply couldn't manage. We had to put the kids into a creche. They lived there for about three months until the crisis was over."

What did they think of residential infant creches, which are widespread in the Soviet Union? Many people I had spoken to when our daughter was an infant in Moscow had disapproved of such creches, saying that babies get more colds when they are in creches, and that the people who work in them are poorly educated, and that they have too many babies to care for.

"But sometimes you have no other choice," Vera Kuleshov said. "It's not something most people do because they want to."

"It wasn't bad for the kids," Valery said. "They were happy there. It was my wife and I who were unhappy. We missed them."

During the course of the evening, it became evident that everyone there had more than one child. Single-child families are common in the large cities of the western Soviet Union and it is rare to encounter a family with more than two. This has been of some concern to the Soviet government because of the implications an inadequate birth rate has for political and military power, for labor resources in a country that suffers from a chronic labor shortage, and for the maintenance of some sort of viable balance between those who work and those who are dependent. The lack of population growth in the European sections of the U.S.S.R. also threatens the existing balance between different national groups. European Soviets, and especially Russians, have no desire to lose their long-standing

political and cultural dominance to the fast-growing Moslem populations in Soviet Central Asia and in the Transcaucasus. At the same time, the Soviet Union faces an immediate labor shortage. More than 90% of all adult women who are not students are working. Pregnancy and infant care remove women from active participation in the labor force. It is this conflict between the immediate labor requirements of industry and the long-term population needs of Soviet society that motivates much of the government policy regarding women.

I asked them about family size. "Did you *want* to have more than one child?"

Everyone nodded.

"Did Nikitin play some role in your decision?"

"Nikitin's example has made us feel free to have more than one child," Lena answered.

"He has made it okay for a lot of us," Valery added.

The permission both Valery and Lena were referring to was obviously social, rather than political. Government policies encouraging large families have been in existence in the Soviet Union for a long time.

I began to see how family clubs served more than the desires of the individual members. Here was one answer to a question that had been at the back of my mind since Valery had told me about Nikitin: Why was this man allowed to lecture all over the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, given time on television and radio, and millions of copies of his columns and books published, when scientists and doctors, who set standards for such matters, had pronounced his views unscientific? Why were these young couples allowed, even encouraged, to form unofficial social groups to raise their children using his philosophy? There were other answers, I was to learn, but family size is certainly one element in the puzzle.

Was housing a problem? I asked. No one in the group around the table that evening seemed to think so. This surprised me because among the Soviets I knew, housing seemed to be a major concern. Everyone always seemed to be scheming to get themselves a bigger apartment, or one that was located more conveniently. It was a perennial topic of conversation with endless tales being told about the maneuverings involved to obtain better housing. I had even heard a woman explain the small size of her family on the basis of the size of her apartment.

Sergei Kuzmenko said that after the birth of a third child a family is entitled to a larger apartment. They are skipped to the head of the waiting list. "You still have to wait and it can get a little tight, but it isn't too bad."

Did the reduction of their income because the wives had taken lower-paying jobs and put more effort into raising several children bother them?

"We have enough," Sergei said. No one disagreed.

I wondered what he meant. Was he saying that they had "enough to be happy in life?" Or did he think that I was implicitly asking about their level of economic well-being compared to Americans? I decided not to pursue the issue. First, it was obvious that they all had the necessities of life and then some, although none of those present lived in luxury. Second, they were all members of family clubs because their families are a source of pleasure. It is a pleasure that is within their control, within the realm of the possible, and probably the most important in their lives. How could I ask them to put a price tag on such a choice?

All the time we were talking, the Kuzmenko children were running in and out of the apartment, grabbing things to eat, climbing up on the sink to get themselves a drink, sitting on their father's or mother's lap for a moment or two and then running off. At about ten o'clock, the eldest was told to get ready for bed, which he did without complaint. The two little ones disappeared a little later.

On the face of it, this commonplace scene may not seem worth commenting on. What struck me as different was that no adult was hovering over these children telling them to dress warmly, to eat, or to brush their teeth, which is what usually happens in the Russian homes I have visited. No one seemed to be worried when the two eldest boys were playing some version of cowboys and Indians, jumping in and out of the windows and onto the terrace. The adults all talked to the children as if they were people worth talking to, not as children to be shushed, told to behave themselves, or to fuss over. The children responded with an easy warmth and openness. Ulyana, the adolescent, was included in the conversation, allowed to ask questions and to give her opinions. When she did not understand, one of the adults filled her in.

We talked on and on. By the time that Vera Kuleshov thought to look at her watch, we had to run if we were to reach the metro before the last train.

It was a jolt to go from the sober discussions about family life to the metro station where the Kuleshovs and I watched as a couple of drunken young men, holding each other up, were staggering and stumbling along the platform, threatening to fall over onto the tracks.

The next morning I had a stroke of good luck. I met Gail Lapidus, the author of *Women, Work and Family in the Soviet Union* (1982), while I was standing in line to get breakfast at the hotel. She was in Moscow to work on a research project and to give some talks at institutes and at Moscow University. My conversation with family club members had left me with dozens of questions, which she is uniquely qualified to answer.

Although Professor Lapidus had not heard of Nikitin or of family clubs, she was not at all surprised to hear that the women I had met had chosen to work in menial jobs, even though they were well educated. It's the old problem of the double burden of family responsibilities and work that women bear in the Soviet Union, she explained. In Russia, family is still very much the woman's responsibility. Men provide little help. As a result, women gravitate to jobs that are more compatible with their domestic responsibilities. Such jobs generally pay less so the average female worker makes roughly 65 kopeks to the ruble that men earn.

Even if women are well educated and working in traditional Soviet "women's jobs" such as doctors, teachers, or social workers, their earning power is less than men's. In any occupation, women are concentrated at the lower levels. The proportion of women falls as the level of skill, responsibility, and pay rises. Even if they begin with the same education and qualifications as men, women are likely to end up earning less. Most of them don't have the free time to read and take the requalification courses needed to keep up with the latest developments in their fields. Managers think that women aren't as productive and they are afraid that they will ask for a maternity leave. As a result, women tend to get stuck in the less rewarding and less stimulating jobs, which, of course, makes their private lives all the more important to them.

Except for a few details such as the fact that American women earn 62 cents to every dollar men earn, instead of the 65 kopeks Soviet women earn, Professor Lapidus might have been talking about the majority of working women in the United States.

FAMILY CLUBS AND THE U.S. HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT

A few evenings later, my husband and I went over to Katia and Volodya's apartment again. I told them about the family clubs and we talked about the similarities between the problems of working women in our two countries. Close to midnight, Joseph Goldin came by to visit. With him was an American, Charles "Raz" Ingrasci, who was then director of the international program of Werner Erhard and Associates. A whole new dimension of the family clubs revealed itself as Raz and Joseph talked.

It seems that Werner Erhard would like to export their method of group consciousness transformation to the Soviet Union. "We would like to see if we can establish a new arena of exchange in which we work together in large group training programs focused on expanded productivity, health, well-being, and communication," Ingrasci explained. He told us that they have received the recognition of the *Znanya Society* (Knowledge Society). There is no precise analogue for the Znanya Society in the United States. It is the centralized organization responsible for booking lecture tours, continuing education programs, and for various programs on Soviet culture that are presented abroad. It also has a publishing arm that produces 38 different magazines and approximately 700 hardcover books each year. With an annual budget of over 100 million rubles, generated wholly by its own activity, it is a giant knowledge-dissemination organization. Ingrasci believed that the society would be a perfect vehicle for arranging training seminars all over the Soviet Union.

And what was Joseph Goldin's role in all of this, I wanted to know. Joseph, Volodya explained, was the founder and Scientific Secretary of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences Commission for the Complex Study of Man at the 1979 International Symposium on the Problems of Unconscious Mental Activity that was held in Tbilisi in the Republic of Georgia. That conference was noteworthy because it established the legitimacy of studies of the unconscious in Soviet science. It was at that conference that Joseph had made contact with psychologists from the American human potential movement.

I was more than a little taken aback by this revelation and by the conjunction of an investigatory commission and the unconscious. In my view, it was a contradiction in terms. Now I could see that there was more than momentary eccentricity behind Joseph's suggestion that I watch mothers give birth with porpoises.

Volodya told us that Joseph had been passionately involved with the concept of "hidden human potentials" since 1969, when, as a graduate student at the Institute of Biophysics, he had attended the first Suggestopedia class taught in Moscow by Dr. Georgi Lazonov. Lazonov is a Bulgarian physician who has lectured all over the world on his language training methods. He believes that there are "hidden reserves of the mind" that are ordinarily outside of our conscious control. He invented Suggestopedia as a method to tap into these reserves in learning a language.

Joseph is convinced that most of us are prevented from developing all of our potential by socially conditioned barriers. He is so convinced of this that he has dedicated his life to demonstrating the truth of these assertions in large group settings. He has played a central role in arranging simultaneous videocasts between the Soviet Union and the United States that he hopes will transform people's consciousness.

Several weeks later when I had returned to California, I found a description of one of Joseph's experiments in Stanley Krippner's book, *Human Possibilities* (1980). Krippner, a past president of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, reports that Joseph made a dozen stutterers speak fluently in front of an audience of 800 people at a session he conducted at Moscow's Taganka Theater. His technique was quite amazing. While studying reports of instantaneous cures of stuttering, he noticed that they had three elements in common: a group support system, positive expectations on the part of the afflicted person, and careful preparation on the part of the healer. He then put these principles into effect. He prepared a biography of each stutterer that was read as a dramatic monologue by a physician to the audience. He then exhorted the stutterer to stop stuttering. The audience, which contained many friends and family members of the stutterers, was emotionally moved and when the stutterers spoke fluently, it broke into cheers, and some even cried.

As it turned out, Joseph not only had contact with representa-

tives of Werner Erhard and Associates, he also had helped representatives from Esalen Institute. In the months that followed, I was able to piece together from a variety of conversations, Esalen Institute catalogues, and memoranda the following chronicles of the Soviet Union's relations with Esalen Institute. In 1971, Michael Murphy, a founder of Esalen, visited the U.S.S.R. as a guest of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In 1972, James Hickman, director of the Esalen Institute's Soviet American Exchange Program, attended a meeting in Moscow on the problem of bio-energy. At the time, Hickman, who has an M.A. in psychology from Sonoma State University, was working at the Menninger Dream Laboratory at the Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York. In 1973, Hickman was a speaker at a conference on parapsychology in Czechoslovakia. After the conference he visited a number of laboratories dedicated to the study of "exceptional performance" and parapsychology in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany.

He did not return to the Soviet Union again until 1979, when he attended the Symposium on the Problems of the Unconscious. He was accompanied to Tbilisi by Mary Payne of Esalen Institute. It was in Tbilisi that Hickman and Payne met Joseph Goldin. After the conference, Hickman spent seven weeks traveling throughout the Soviet Union visiting laboratories as part of his work for the Transformation Project Archive, which gathered reports of studies concerned with extraordinary psychophysical capacities.

It was while Hickman was working with Murphy on this project that they decided to initiate the Soviet-American Exchange Program. They were encouraged by Dr. Valentin Berezhev, First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, who visited Big Sur in February 1980 with his wife. The Soviet-American Exchange Program's stated purpose is

to help create bases for harmonious relations between nations by developing innovative approaches to US-Soviet cooperation. Our emphasis is on maximizing the impact of citizen diplomacy as a supportive structure for creative government diplomacy. . . . Esalen Institute has pioneered the development of skills that enhance personal relations. Over the past four years, the Exchange Program has taken the lead in applying these skills to reduce enmity and misunderstanding between the US and USSR. (*Interim Report*, 1984)

The exchange program plans to realize these goals through a number of projects, including dialogues between astronauts and cosmonauts, satellite linkups between groups in the two countries, exchanges on topics such as health promotion—with an emphasis on physical fitness, disease prevention, and holistic health; invitational conferences on such topics as the psychology of U.S.-Soviet Relations; public seminars; Soviet scholars in residence at Esalen Institute; and information exchanges.

After their meeting in Tbilisi, Goldin arranged for Hickman and Murphy to represent Esalen at the International Conference on Sports and Modern Society that was held in conjunction with the 1980 Olympic Games. As guest of the Soviet Sports Committee, they spoke at the conference on the role of mind in exceptional physical performance. A number of other projects were conceived with Joseph's help during the six weeks that Hickman, Mary Payne, Michael Murphy, and his wife, Dulce, spent in the Soviet Union that summer.

Many prominent Soviets have taken part in these Esalen-sponsored exchanges, among them Georgi Skorov and Yuri Zamoshkin of Moscow's Institute of USA and Canada Studies, Dr. Vlail Kaznacheyev, Director of the Institute for Clinical and Experimental Medicine, as well as several prominent Soviet journalists. Both Skorov and Zamoshkin have been guests of Esalen.

THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT AND THE HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT

These exchanges are puzzling for many reasons. Soviet citizens are not free to establish relations with foreign organizations on an individual basis. When an official of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies comes to visit Esalen Institute, that individual is acting in an official capacity. His visit has been sanctioned by his government and he will be expected to report back to his government on its results.

The position of American citizens is quite different. Private individuals and organizations can establish relations with foreign organizations and governments, and have throughout our nation's history. The Irish Republican Army's fund-raising activities in this country, and Jane Fonda's much-publicized visit to Hanoi

during the Vietnam war, are two examples of such connections that have been frowned on by the United States government, but tolerated nonetheless.

That leaves the question of the Soviet's motives for permitting these connections to be formed. The most obvious reason is that the Soviet Union wants to use Esalen and other such organizations to reach the American public with a message that is more sympathetic to the Soviets than the one being purveyed by the standard news media and the government of the United States. The U.S.S.R. has used private organizations and individuals in just this way throughout its history. It has also used them as a means of approaching our government when official channels have been closed. What is more, the Soviets are aware that many influential Americans are sympathetic to Esalen and Werner Erhard and Associates and have connections with those who have participated in their programs. More interesting are motives internal to the Soviet Union, its problems, its history, and its ambitions.

The human potential movement's belief in the power of the individual to act seems to speak rather directly to a nagging problem of Soviet life, the problem of productivity. In 1982, Soviet output per worker grew at a rate of 2.1%. But wages grew at the rate of 2.7%. In January, 1983, Soviet authorities made a series of highly publicized raids on Moscow stores and markets to find delinquent workers. Their method was simple: lock the doors, check everyone's identity card, and prosecute people who could not excuse their absence from work. At the same time, the Party apparatus in office complexes and factories started checking up on tardiness; managers began to get in trouble when their subordinates came to work late, or turned up on the lists of people caught out shopping during work hours.

In February of 1983, Secretary Andropov outlined a three-part economic program. First, he would crack down on those who, in his words, "sponge on society." The whole country, he said, had to pay for "those who squander its wealth because of a half-hearted attitude toward duty." No one had any trouble imagining what this meant; the events of January had made that clear enough. During his short term in office, Andropov presided over the biggest personnel shake-up of management and party bosses since the first year of Brezhnev's stewardship in the mid-1960s. Second, he promised material rewards, a carrot to accompany his

stick. But the carrots were to be given selectively. It was a mistake, he said, to "lunge ahead" to the communist ideal of equality. Economic benefits should be linked to economic performance. By the same token, economic sanctions should be applied against the laggards. In the Soviet Union, not only television sets and new cars are often in short supply, but also such basic necessities as housing and food. It is not clear how Andropov or anyone else can break out of the vicious circle of low productivity and a dearth of material incentives. Andropov, himself, was vague. His prescription was political flexibility to overcome "bureaucratic over-organization and formalism."

Following Andropov's death, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, now head of the ruling Soviet politburo, called for "Bolshevik-type efficiency oriented at practical results in work, perfecting the style of party leadership" and for greater initiative from managers throughout the state and economic bureaucracy. All important administrative posts, he said, should be filled by people "capable of thinking and acting in a modern way and able to take decisions."

Recently, Gorbachev has stated that he believes that accelerating economic growth is feasible

if the intensification of the economy and the acceleration of scientific and technical progress are placed at the center of all our work, if management, planning and structural and investment policy are restructured, if organization and discipline are enhanced everywhere, and if the style of activity is fundamentally improved.

He believes that success depends on putting "organizational-economic and social reserves into action and . . . energizing the human factor, making sure that everyone works conscientiously at peak efficiency in his job."

Here we come to the heart of the problem. Over the processes of production and consumption in the U.S.S.R. squats a giant, top-heavy system of control in which the truth comes from "higher up," and the kind of initiative implied by the code words *political flexibility* is all but impossible to sustain, except in times of national emergency. Whereas the ideologists and politicians struggle with this problem in the traditional way, there are also efforts to find "scientific" solutions that will change people's attitudes toward their work in ways that will increase productivity and efficiency.

The chronic problems of low productivity and a shortage of material incentives to fuel worker enthusiasm suggest one area in which the expertise of the American human potential movement might appear attractive to Soviet planners. Increasingly during the past decade, large American firms have been using human potential workshops to address the kinds of problems common to large, bureaucratic organizations. Esalen offers special workshops for managers to complement those already aimed at increasing life satisfaction through various forms of self-actualization.

A major theme in these workshops is that managers are in large part responsible for the problem of low productivity. Esalen tells them: "We must change who we are, as well as what we do." One workshop listed in the Esalen Catalogue for January-June 1983 is billed as follows:

Managers are bombarded with a host of issues on a daily basis. In a survey of corporate management personnel the most frequently mentioned concerns were the rapid rate of change, motivation and worker needs, conflict resolution, participative management, communication, leadership, team building, and stress management.

Using Energy Training principles and activities, each of these topics will be addressed, offering managers insights into alternative ways of dealing with the issues. Participants will discover how problems can be used as opportunities and how sudden shocks and surprises can be used to improve performance.

This approach to management training has been used at leading corporations and institutions including General Electric, Ampex, Rolm, the U.S. Forest Service, Golden Gate University and Stanford Medical Center.

These activities are available on an individual as well as a corporate basis. During a weekend in Big Sur, for example, people can attend a workshop designed "for people who give service to others and are experiencing burnout." Those who attend are promised "the tools and opportunities to learn how to handle these problems in order to increase the productivity and creativity of their relationships with clients and colleagues." A workshop on love and work ("Work is love made visible"—K. Gibran) is designed "for those discontented with their worklife."

A tendency in many of these programs is their assumption of the legitimacy of whatever work arrangements or managerial

enterprise to which the burned out, harassed trainees might be subjected. The basic premise is that through *self*-realization, *individual* insight, and *self*-control, we can “blend” with the forces that envelope our lives. Increasing human potential means increasing individual choice inside of constraints that threaten to overwhelm human initiative. There is a striking resonance between these ideas from the mecca of American self-realization and the writings of Soviet psychologists, who for many decades had proclaimed the possibility of creating a “new Soviet man.”

SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY AND THE HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT

Esalen also recognized this similarity. In an article on the Soviet-American exchange program in the *Esalen Catalogue* for September 1981-February 1982, Michael Murphy and Jim Hickman point to the “remarkable symmetry” between Soviet and American interests in human potential. Here’s how they put it:

There is a remarkable symmetry, we discovered, between Soviet and American interests in these fields. The Soviet term, “hidden reserves,” for example, is almost identical to the American “human potential” as a guiding idea. Soviet concern with “maximum performance” resembles American studies of “peak experience.”

This symmetry is not a recent development. It goes back to the beginnings of psychology in the U.S.S.R. and remains deeply tied, as paradoxical as it may seem, to the way Marxism is employed in Soviet psychological theory.

During the 1920s, psychological research had been viewed as a productive force by the Soviet leadership. Krupskaya, Lenin’s wife, worked directly with well-known educators to create outstanding schools. It was a basic tenet of these pioneer educators that every individual is capable of making significant contributions to society if conditions are arranged to bring out the special potential that every human possesses.

Official Soviet psychology has always maintained that human consciousness is a special property of human beings that allows us to shape our own character and improve the general quality of our existence. The highest form of consciousness is promotion of

the society's welfare; working for the good of humanity is the proper form of motivation.

This scheme does not deny a role to genetic inheritance in shaping individual human behavior, but it provides a far greater role to the environment than has been fashionable in Western Europe and America in this century. In this sense, Soviet psychology has been optimistic as a matter of principle. But it is a principle with an interesting twist. Because, under conditions of Soviet socialism, the environment is supposed to be a healthy one for individual development, it is not acceptable to blame the larger environment for developmental failures. The failure can only be one of training and individual resolve.

The goal of Soviet upbringing following from these assumptions is "self-training," training that has been internalized by the individual. Through self-training—properly organized—the potential of the individual is believed to be almost infinitely plastic.

The "remarkable symmetry" Murphy and Hickman note between Soviet and American ideas about human potential manifests itself in a common interest in psychological pursuits that ordinarily occupy only a fringe position within American psychology; one of these is parapsychology, the acquisition of knowledge through telepathy, extrasensory perception, and so on. During the 1960s, there were a number of well-publicized cases within the U.S.S.R. in which scientists displayed individuals thought to possess telepathic powers. Although some members of the Soviet psychological establishment wanted to dismiss such cases, in 1973 a group of leading psychologists wrote an article in the prestigious journal *Problems of Philosophy* (*Voprosy Filosofii*) proposing the establishment of a laboratory within the psychological establishment to study psychic phenomena.

One of the signatories to this article was Alexei Leontiev, then dean of Psychology at Moscow University. As a young man, Leontiev had done research on the ability of human beings to perceive such unusual stimuli as the *color* of light hitting the skin and claimed success if it were arranged that such stimuli mediate meaningful human activity. Another signatory was Boris Lomov, currently director of the Institute of Psychology in the Academy of Sciences. Lomov's assistant director, Yuri Zabrodin, has participated in a variety of Esalen-sponsored activities in recent years.

This interest in the possibility of human beings making use of untapped sources of energy to amplify their powers has led to a number of Soviet projects that are definitely at the fringes of scientific respectability from an American perspective. Perhaps the best-publicized case is the underwater birth research of Dr. Igor Charkovsky in Moscow. Even in Southern California, we could read about his claims that children who begin life as underwater swimmers suffer fewer colds than their age-mates born on dry land. The Soviets have also shown intense interest in yoga, the possibility of communication with animals, faith healing, and homeopathy.

No one of these projects, by itself, promises any sort of scientific breakthrough. And none, of course, will solve the shopping problems of workers who are at work during the hours the stores are open. But taken as a whole, they point to an extraordinary openness among Soviet psychologists to ways that individuals can increase their effectiveness by altering their relationship to their everyday worlds. The similarity between the spirit and content of these Soviet efforts and the techniques developed by the human potential movement provides one obvious avenue of exchange.

LENA'S TWINS

I saw Valery Hiltounen once more before we left Moscow. I wanted to clear up some questions that were troubling me from our previous meeting. When I called, he told me that Lena had given birth to her baby. In fact, she had given birth to two babies! She had not expected twins. Valery said that with a little luck she would be there when I arrived at his apartment.

I invited Jay Belsky, a professor of child development at Pennsylvania State University, to come along and see what a pair of Russian newborns are like. Jay had completed his meetings at the Institute of Psychology and was happy for this opportunity to visit a Russian home.

When we arrived, we learned that Lena and the twins were still in the hospital. Valery related how the clinic in which Lena had planned to give birth had been overcrowded when the time came. They decided on an unattended home-birth, as several other family club members have done before them, rather than go to a regular maternity clinic. Lena achieved her purpose. The

babies were born in Valery's apartment. She had a chance to hold the twins and nurse them immediately after birth. She was able to look on as the older children bathed their newborn sister and brother with their father's help. Then they called a taxi and went to a maternity clinic to register the births with the state.

The authorities at the clinic disapproved. In fact, they interpreted her actions to mean that she did not want to keep the babies and was trying to get rid of them. They kept her at the hospital for several days until she could convince them otherwise and go home.

Rather than confront the established way of doing things directly, the Kuzmenkos had taken matters into their own hands. Just as Nikitin had sent his children to government schools, but also taught them at home himself, the Kuzmenkos had found their own way around the system, a private way that could not be construed as troublemaking. Now I understood why they had been unwilling to discuss my question about coming into conflict with the system. It would be stupid to announce ahead of time that you are going to try to get around the system.

I was glad that it had worked out well. But I could not help but wonder what would have happened if something had gone wrong at the birth. In California, a number of people who have attended homebirths in which deaths have occurred or in which the baby has been injured have been prosecuted. There is no reason to suspect that Soviet authorities would be any more accepting or lenient in the event of a mishap than those in California.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

We sat in the kitchen while Sergei fed the three children pilmeni, a Russian dish similar to cheese ravioli, that he had bought ready-made at the store. I asked Valery a couple of questions, but I felt bad that Jay was left out. So I suggested that Valery tell Jay about the family clubs and I would check my impressions as he went along. Valery was happy to exercise his English and he retold many of the stories I had heard at our previous meetings.

Once again Valery pulled out from his drawer the pile of photographs of his children participating in different family

club activities. I saw someone in the photographs who looked familiar. "Who is that?" I asked.

"Michael Murphy," Valery answered. "He is a wonderful man. He gave me this." Saying this, he went over to the bookshelf and pulled down a volume by Murphy. It was autographed.

I listened as Valery recounted the "Expedition to the Hidden Human Reserves." As Valery spoke, Sergei's youngest, a two-and-a-half-year-old girl, was flirting with Jay. Shyly at first, and then more boldly, she eyed this tall stranger who was smiling at her and talking in a language she could not understand. Experienced daddy and psychologist that he is, Jay flirted back. While Valery once again, with the same energy and warmth, talked about family club activities, I thought about the incredible corner of Soviet society that Joseph and Valery had opened to me, and the very decent people I had met there.

The conversations that we had held at the Hiltounen's kitchen table would have been just as appropriate at Esalen in Big Sur, California. The participants are similar in many ways too. Both the members of the family clubs in the Soviet Union and those who participate in est or Esalen seminars and workshops in the United States tend to be in their late twenties and thirties. They are relatively well-educated people who live in urban and suburban settings. Many of them work in industries based on electronics and computers and are trained as engineers and computer specialists. Others work as managers, or in the fields of education or social welfare. They work 40 hours a week or more in large bureaucratic institutions that regulate their hours and their activities.

Not surprisingly, these people share many of the same dissatisfactions. After a few years on the job, their worklife reaches a point at which the excitement of achieving is past and repetition begins. The rapid development of technology and its scientific base leaves many behind once they take on administrative responsibilities that require them to spend most of their days managing people and accounts.

In both the United States and the U.S.S.R. (and in other technologically advanced societies, as well), the organization of technological work brings people into conflict with their desire to have intimate relations with others, and especially with their desire to have a family life. It splits husbands from wives, parents from children, and friends from one another. The divorce rate in

the Soviet Union is second only to that of the United States. It is especially high in the large European cities of the Soviet Union, where increasing numbers of divorces are initiated by women who are dissatisfied with the situation in which they bear the double burden of work and of housework, with little help from their husbands.

Despite these similarities, there are striking differences between such projects as the Expedition to the Hidden Human Reserves held in Moscow, and the activities in Big Sur. The major focus in Moscow was on *children*: how to help develop their mental and physical abilities. The children from Moscow family clubs demonstrated their athletic abilities by maneuvering on a rope "jungle"; they also exhibited their creative abilities in music, painting, and architectural construction. The audience had a lively discussion afterward about how to structure everyday life so that the creativity the children had been demonstrating would best be developed and find expression.

The voice of Sergei's daughter broke into my reflections. She was singing a song that seemed very familiar. Jay and Valery seemed to ignore her but, at the same time, Jay's fingers were marching surreptitiously up and down the edge of the table as if he were going to tickle her. Then I remembered where I had heard the song she was singing. It was at the nursery school connected to the Institute of Preschool Education. Two days earlier when I had gone to visit the school with a group of American child development experts, the children had performed this song in the program they had put on to entertain us. Jay and several of the other Americans had been put off by the display. Little children sang and danced in imitation of an adult style that far surpassed their years. It was too well rehearsed for the taste of American child development specialists. "Like trained seals," one of them had said. They wanted to see the children as they "normally" were, not in some kind of performance.

If Jay thought that this little girl was acting like a trained seal, he did not show it. Yet here she was, singing the same song, which she had repeated many times at nursery school in order to be able to perform smoothly at grand occasions such as the one we had attended. In the different context of a family dinner when guests stop in, the very behavior that had put Jay off a few days earlier was a charming medium to mutual understanding.

There is a lesson in the little girl's song and the circumstances in which we heard it. What I discovered in the Soviet Union was a group of people whose life experiences were in many ways uncannily like my own. The women I met faced similar problems in raising their children and maintaining their careers. The men and women were searching for personal meaning in a highly technological world, where the ideal of individual initiative is constantly undermined by bureaucratically regulated systems of control. Given these similar circumstances, people in each country have come up with similar designs for organizing their lives, and similar beliefs, right down to an interest in natural childbirth, and a semimystical belief in the power of human beings to transform their lives through self-motivated reorganization of their experience. But just as the little girl's song had suggested one interpretation at school and another when she was trying to get Jay's attention, our respective populations' interest in human potential take on different meanings when placed in their respective national contexts.

In both the United States and the U.S.S.R., advocates promise to unleash potential in the service of the organization in which people already work. The major difference between the Soviet hidden human reserves and the American human potential movement occurs in the realm of the personal. In the United States, the human potential movement amplifies our national celebration of individual happiness as the key to our political system and the source of economic motivation. It helps its followers to discover and to do "their own thing." In the Soviet Union, family club members seek their personal happiness and realization of their aspirations socially, rather than individually. Individual change is mediated through helping children to realize *their* potential. In addition to personal benefits and the help that they provide for their children, the social organization of human potential recommended by Nikitin spreads benefits to the community through the projects that families engage in together.

As Valery Hiltounen described a family club festival in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (1982), it was a "holiday of exchanges, of sober and constructive dialogue, a form of leisure time which unites, not separates children and parents." I could now understand why *Komsomolskaya Pravda* gives space to such descriptions. Too few other positive solutions to the crumbling of family life are being

offered in the United States or the U.S.S.R. And if Soviet children end up being physically more able, creative, and brighter as a result of these activities and their parents' voluntary efforts, who is to lose? Certainly not the Soviet government that will reap the benefits of having a larger and more able work force without any additional expenditures or massive programs.

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