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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Keith Kennedy Tells Russia Experience

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THE PEOPLE of the Soviet Union are the salt of the earth, you just couldn't meet any finer folk – but travelling in Russia presents some most unusual difficulties, and some rare experiences, Keith Kennedy, Charlottetown told me for this week's column.

Mr. Kennedy went to Kiev, Russia for the World Poultry Congress. He had many interesting experiences, and observations. I'll tell you about a few of them.

The Canadians – there were 22 men and 11 women – had planned to spend two days in Moscow on the way to Kiev. Their reservations had been made several months before, they had received confirmation through the mails. But they were told there's no room in the hotel when they arrived in the Russian capital, "You'll have to go through to Kiev", they were advised.

But the Moscow visit was a must for them, so they put up a battle. They reached Moscow about nine p.m. It was about 11 p.m. when they finally won the concession. "We'll give you rooms for the night but you must be out by five in the morning."

That was not acceptable either, "We had planned on two days in Moscow", Keith told me. So the argument continued, with the Canadians insisting on the rooms they had contracted for in advance.

It was about two in the morning, Keith contends, when they finally won out and were told the rooms were available for the two days.

Towel Soaked – Still Had To Use It

After trying the idea of leaving his damp towel in plain view for a few days, Keith put it under the shower and turned on the tap. Then he left the thoroughly soaked towel for the room maid to replace with a dry one.

All that happened, though, was that Keith had to use the thoroughly soaked towel, and he used it for the remainder of his stay. A clean, dry towel just didn't make an appearance.

The story of the drain for the bathroom shower is good. The shower is on one side of the bathroom but the drain is across the room, on the other side. It meant, Keith explains, that when you were taking a shower the floor was awash with several inches of water. The water was swirling around the toilet bowl and the wash basin.

I asked Keith if there was any obvious reason why this arrangement was made, but he could not see any, "not for the life of me", he emphasized.

There appears to be a firm resolve on the part of the Russian officials, or directors of activity, to prevent friendly mixing, or conversations between the visitors and the help. The waitresses in the hotel dining room were unusually friendly on a particular day. There was friendly banter and joking between the Canadian visitors and the girls while the meal was in progress.

Suddenly one of the Canucks noticed the girls were not around. After five minutes, or so, the waitresses returned. But their eyes were red from crying, they had been scolded severely, the Canadians decided, for being too friendly, for talking freely to the visitors.

Marriage Bureau – Church Visited

KEITH TRIED to see as much of Russian life as he could during his short stay in the country. I've an idea he didn't spend too much time at the poultry congress. He visited a marriage bureau and saw a woman J.P., or the Russian equivalent, marrying couples. The whole ceremony required about four to five minutes, he reports.

But Russian couples can get married much more simply. They select their mates and sign their names on a register, and that's that, he tells me.

There are three churches in Russia. There are the Baptist, the Roman Catholic and the Russian Orthodox. Keith went to a Baptist church in Kiev on Tuesday night and he received one of the warmest welcomes of his life.

"I intended to slip in, take a back seat and see just how the service was conducted", he told me. But they spotted the visitor as soon as he entered the door. He was taken to the stage, met the minister – a visiting minister there had spent four years in Toronto and could speak English – and Keith was asked if he wished to speak to the congregation. He did just that. "I told them something about myself, what I was doing, and a few facts about Canada", he told me. The minister was able to interpret for him.

After the service – it lasted two and one-quarter hours incidentally – he went up on the platform to speak to the minister again. He was there for about an hour, I gather, and the people crowded around him. Some who were close shook hands, others reached in to touch him, a few kissed him. When the minister explained that kissing strangers was not done in Canada they desisted. But they had many questions. "We have a thousand questions", they told him and the minister was fairly swamped with the task of interpreting.

'I'll Never Forget Looks On Faces'

"I'll never forget the eager look in those people's faces as they watched me as I tried to tell them something about our country, in reply to their queries", he told me. "Of course they couldn't understand what I was saying, but their faces bore a look of rapt interest, and a desire to learn something about the outside world, I'll never forget," Mr. Kennedy recalls.

They persuaded him to return for the Thursday night service, and this time many had small gifts for him. There were small bottles of perfume and similar gifts some of which Keith will probably keep as a highly treasured memory as long as he lives. He was there for an hour each night after the service.

Those people couldn't possibly be any nicer, he told me with emphasis.

The fact the churches are boarded up on the outside probably goes back to the time churches were banned in Russia, Keith is not sure. He did tell me that the church going people are frowned upon by the rest. They are not allowed to become members of the Communist party.

I want to say here that Keith has a most interesting story to tell, and he tells it in most interesting fashion. He has many slides which are interesting and informative. I have his permission – I asked for it – to tell you that he is available with his slides, to talk to groups across the Island. Normally I don't like talks with slides – most people show far too many – but I can recommend Keith as a man who will interest your group. I have never seen slides, and heard a talk on Russia that covers so much of the life there in such interesting fashion.

Separate Vacations For Couples

THE PEOPLE get two weeks vacation and are sent by their unions to vacation spots. This is an important part of their life, and the people look forward to it each year. But often the husbands and wives go to separate vacation areas. If they are not members of the same union, they do not vacation together, even though their holidays should come at the same time, Mr. Kennedy explains.

The children are sent to vacation camp – there are seven camps that accommodate 1,000 each in the Kiev area, for example. So there are no family vacations for the workers, he observed.

Some of my male readers may wish they were in Russia, when they read this part. Most of the heavy work in Russia is done by women, Keith tells me. "I've seen them using these pneumatic hammers on the streets", he says for example.

He saw them refueling planes, they do mostly all the bricklaying. They even work in coal mines.

But the women doing this hard labor work get more wages than do the menfolk Keith said, more than some white collar workers get. When I asked him "why?", Mr. Kennedy recalled "the somber, significant fact that perhaps eight million Russian men were killed during the Second World War". This is one reason why women were brought into the labor force. Nearly half of their labor force are women, he said.

Most of the teachers are women. Four out of every five doctors are women. The work of healing is a gentle thing, women fit into it better than men, the Soviets suggest.

Some 50 per cent of the engineers are women.

Professor Gets General's Salary

THE RUSSIANS value education most highly, and this is as it should be, Mr. Kennedy observes. A full fledged college professor gets as much as an Army general, "I don't know what Generals are paid in Russia, but in our country it would be about \$30,000" Mr. Kennedy observes. "And college professors do not get that here."

I leave the Kennedy story of Russia reluctantly, but space is just gone. I hope you enjoyed it.