

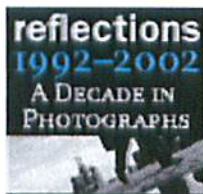
Front Page
Current Issue
News
Business
Stock Market
Opinion
Elections 2003
Metropolis
Travel Guide
News Summary

Subscribe
Archive Search
PDF Edition

Advertising
Jobs & Career
Conferences
English Courses
Photobook
Classifieds
Reprints
About/Contacts

Search Site

GO!



Ведомости.
Деловая газета.

The St. Petersburg
Times

The Moscow Times
Business
Review



Monday, Dec. 8, 2003. Page 10

Road to U.S. Is Paved With Humiliations

By Matt Erwins

A few years ago, my Ukrainian-born wife and I were killing time in a waiting room in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. We sat in plastic chairs, which lined three of the walls; the fourth was a row of consular officials behind glass, and while you meekly awaited their summons you couldn't help but listen to everyone else's interviews.

The consular officials acted like this was utterly routine and banal (which for them it was); the applicants, like all of their hopes and dreams were at stake (which they were).

An older couple came scurrying obsequiously up and shoved their paperwork through the hole in the window. The consular official began asking bored-sounding questions, to which the couple gave eager-to-please answers.

It says here there's supposed to be a Baba Klava as well, the young official asked -- where's Baba Klava?

Baba Klava, the couple answered with apologetic grins, is in a wheelchair, and since they couldn't get her inside they left her out front.

A collective gasp shot through the room, as we all realized that some poor babushka had been left in a wheelchair on the sidewalk for perhaps a couple of hours. All eyes focused on the young consular official, who was starting to look angry -- the suspense mounted; would we finally witness a human emotion on the other side of the glass?

The young official sighed petulantly. "Is it still raining?" he asked -- and again a collective gasp shot through the room, as many of us suddenly remembered it had been pouring rain and probably was still.

Oh, yes, said the obsequious couple, with all of their eager-to-please enthusiasm, yes! Still raining!

"Damn!" said the consular official. The suspense peaked, as he glared accusingly at the older couple before him. "Damn! Now I have to go get my coat."

He didn't care about an elderly woman left in a wheelchair in the rain for two hours; he cared about himself, a young guy in his 20s, having to go out in the rain for two minutes to talk with her.

I, at least, am finally free of that particular circle of hell. My wife at last got her U.S. citizenship this year -- after 11 years of marriage. She would have gotten it years sooner but our time working abroad for the Dutch-Russian-owned Moscow Times counted against us. As one U.S. immigration official put it to us, I should have been working for "an American company like the World Bank -- you know, a company that carries American ideology abroad."

Looking back, what my wife hated most was the incessant fingerprinting. She was fingerprinted at least a half-dozen times -- sometimes within mere months of the

To Our Readers

Has something you've read here startled you? Are you angry, excited, puzzled or pleased? Do you have ideas to improve our coverage?

Then please write to us. All we ask is that you include your full name, the name of the city from which you are writing and a contact telephone number in case we need to get in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

[Email the Opinion Page Editor](#)

Hot

- International Er to supply Georgia electricity (RBC)
- Scientists concerned of GMOs in Russia (RBC)
- RBC-Composit close) (RBC)
- METRO Cash& trade center in I (RBC)
- Putin praises w Duma (RBC)

The I
Sc
On R

On
Ser
Cer

For all
TheMoscowTi
services
Archiv
PDF I
Print Ser
Password
User Re

previous fingerprinting. It's a fussy, time-consuming and messy affair -- ink gets all over, and they aren't always good about having towels or water around to clean it off. And, unless you're good at keeping your sense of humor and perspective, it's insulting.

So it's incredibly disheartening to think that in just a month's time, Americans, Brits, Canadians and others who don't need U.S. visas will be flying into the United States and waltzing past long lines -- where Russians, Indians, Mexicans and other nationalities who do need visas will all be getting fingerprinted and will all be collecting Baba Klava-like stories of countless thoughtless humiliations to share back home.

Matt Bivens, a former editor of The Moscow Times, writes the Daily Outrage for The Nation magazine. [www.thematerial.com]

Back	Email it	Next	Print	Top	Email Us
----------------------	--------------------------	----------------------	-----------------------	---------------------	--------------------------

© Copyright 2002, The Moscow Times. All Rights Reserved.

Visit our reprint rights page [here](#).
Request [reprint rights](#) for this article.