

Twelfth Annual Mortenson Distinguished Lecture
October 21, 2002

MARIANNA TAX CHOLDIN



**WALLS AND WINDOWS,
ISLANDS AND BRIDGES**

Libraries Along the Road to Civil Society

**WALLS AND WINDOWS,
ISLANDS AND BRIDGES**

Libraries Along the Road to Civil Society

MARIANNA TAX CHOLDIN

Twelfth Annual Mortenson
Distinguished Lecture
October 21, 2002



It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Twelfth Annual Mortenson Distinguished Lecture by Marianna Tax Choldin, Mortenson Distinguished Professor and Director of the Mortenson Center for International Librarianship at the University Library. The Lecture was presented shortly before Dr. Choldin's retirement and it marks the culmination of her notable career.

Dr. Choldin, whose degrees are from the University of Chicago, is known throughout the world for her unceasing commitment to improving library services, to sharing knowledge, to fighting censorship, and to opening the doors of intellectual and human exchanges that have enriched the lives of thousands of people directly and indirectly. Her work was recognized in 2000 by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who presented her with the prestigious Pushkin Medal in recognition of her extraordinary contributions to Russia in the sphere of education and culture. In 2001, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recognized Dr. Choldin for her work in international librarianship by awarding her the first Distinguished Faculty Award for International Achievement.

The editor of five books on censorship, intellectual freedom, and Slavic and East European studies, Dr. Choldin has also translated four books and chapters, written more than thirty articles and chapters in books, and served as curator of several exhibits on censorship. Her ability to translate her beliefs into action through her librarianship, her scholarship, and her service to the profession has created programs and advanced ideas that benefits the profession around the world.

In "Walls and Windows, Islands and Bridges: Libraries Along the Road to Civil Society," Dr. Choldin reflects on her international experiences and brings them to life for her listeners and readers.

Paula T. Kaufman
University Librarian
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

WALLS AND WINDOWS, ISLANDS AND BRIDGES

Libraries Along the Road to Civil Society

On this campus, so strong in civil engineering and architecture, I suppose my title could be misunderstood, so I want to declare at the outset that I won't be talking about structures. I do have one small fragment of building material with me—this piece of the Berlin Wall—but, as you have probably guessed, I want to talk with you today about walls and windows, islands and bridges, as symbols rather than as physical objects. Walls and islands are, for me, signs of isolation, of barriers, of obstacles. Windows are opportunities and openings. Bridges are connections, networks, mutual aid and understanding.

As for the second part of my title, I should say something about civil society and its cousin, open society. The term "civil society" is widely used these days, and probably needs no further elaboration here, except perhaps to say that I like to think of civil society as a place where citizens not only work together to organize their own institutions and participate actively in their own governance, but also do so, in the words of the *Random House Dictionary*, "adhering to the norms of polite social intercourse; not deficient in common courtesy." Perhaps I ask too much, but I've seen so much incivility, in both senses of the word, that I find myself yearning for a civil society that also conducts itself civilly!

For "open society," I adhere to the definition articulated by George Soros, that great philanthropist, opener of windows, and bridge *par excellence*, with whom I had the honor of working during much of the 1990s. For the last 15 years Soros has been putting hundreds of millions of dollars into opening previously closed societies. Let me quote from his speech of five years ago this month, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of his Russian foundation:

On the abstract level, I am inspired by the concept of the open society. The best way to define the concept is to point to its opposite, namely the communist system as it used to function until it ceased functioning. Not only was the Soviet Union closed to the outside with all the restrictions on travel and information with which you are familiar, but it was also closed on the inside.

The official doctrine was supposed to supply all the answers and anybody who disagreed with it was treated as a dissident. I consider such a system intolerable, because no authority can have all the answers. Therefore an official doctrine of this kind can be imposed only by force. We all know by now to what extremes compulsion was carried during Stalin's time.


Following in the footsteps of the philosopher Karl Popper I prefer another form of social organization, an open

society which is based on the recognition that nobody is in possession of the ultimate truth. In an open society people are not only allowed but required to think for themselves and the state is there to serve the people rather than to rule their lives.¹¹

Since the mid-1980s I have been a participant-observer in a number of countries that are in the process of transforming themselves from some type of authoritarian government into some type of democracy, from closed to civil and open societies. I've made most of my trips on behalf of the Center, wearing my Mortenson Professor and Center Director hat; and in some cases I've also worn a Soros Foundation hat, as a member and then chair of the board of the Foundation's Network Library Program. I've often been accompanied by Susan Schnuer, who joined the Center ten years ago. Susan has been a wonderful colleague and traveling companion, and today I'm especially grateful to her for managing the pictures I'll be showing in a moment. (Let me also acknowledge now Debra Bolgla, designer in the University's Office of Publications and Marketing, who helped me to get the most out of my pictures, and who designed the poster you see on the screen now.)



I often visualize the transition process as a road—quite a bumpy one, with lots of curves and dangerous overhangs. Accidents happen along this road, too many of them fatal, and a few of these are marked by memorials, remembering the dead and warning future travelers to be wary. But good things happen along the road too, because the landscape is dotted with all kinds of institutions dedicated to helping people cope with change and to keeping them, if possible, from harm's way. Among the most hospitable of these rest stops are libraries—buildings with lots of windows—and I have seen the powerful force for good they can and do exert.

This afternoon I would like to take you with me on a whirlwind tour along this road, and point out to you a few of the landmarks on my own personal map. Much of our journey will take place in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as that is where my professional life began, and this part of the world continues to be a major focus for me; but we will pass through some other regions as well—Germany, China, South Africa, Haiti, and Latin America—where my travels for the Mortenson Center have taken me in the last decade.

Let us begin before what I shall call "The Changes," meaning the transitions beginning around the time of the collapse of the Berlin Wall. I want to share with you an image from Stalin's Russia, one of the darkest eras in the history of closed and uncivil societies.  We see here a page from the 1949 Soviet national bibliography, with the name of one unfortunate Ivanov

blacked out. This man's name was obliterated, his books were removed from the shelves of all libraries in the country, and he himself became a non-person. Whether he was shot in some cellar, or languished or died in the gulag, I do not know. Whatever his personal fate, let him stand for all the writers, scientists, artists, librarians, and ordinary people whose lives were destroyed in this walled country, this island empire. And not only in this one: many countries, including my own, have blacked out names, and worse. None of us should be complacent. I would be tremendously interested to see the symbols each of us from every country represented here today might choose to represent our own particular version of this tragic story.

I want to move now to the late 1980s, when cracks began to appear in the wall around the Soviet Union and windows began to open. From the mid-1980s on, I traveled to the Soviet Union at least once each year, and through the '90s I was in Russia and the former Soviet Union several times each year. Here are a few impressions: In June 1988, I arrived in Moscow from Beijing to find the impossible happening. A play about Trotsky, whose very name had been forbidden, shown on television. Religious music on the radio for the first time in decades, and by Rachmaninoff, banned for decades in his native country. Strangers on a pleasure boat on the Moskva River weeping together as they exchanged stories of relatives lost in the gulag.

In 1989 a poster appeared in Leningrad,  depicting the masthead of *Pravda*, the Communist Party newspaper, on top of a blank page over which a red pencil is draped. (The poster was given to me by my colleague Maurice Friedberg, whose daughter had picked it up in Leningrad—he and I were delighted, as it illustrated perfectly the phenomenon we had described in our book about Soviet censorship, entitled *The Red Pencil!*) And the following year the cover of *Ogoniek*,  the humor and current affairs magazine, featured a gigantic scissors over a field of text with the caption posing this question: "Farewell to censorship?"

In 1990 I met Ekaterina Genieva, a remarkable woman who has become my close friend and colleague. Some of you will remember that Katya delivered the 1999 Mortenson Lecture, and that she received an honorary degree from this University in 2001. Katya visited me early in the summer of 1991, and after seeing a poster in my office for the exhibition on censorship in the Slavic world that I had curated for the New York Public Library, she proposed that we prepare an exhibit together, on Russian and Soviet censorship, for her library in Moscow, the Library for Foreign Literature, one of the largest libraries in the country. Established in 1923, this was a peculiarly Soviet institution, designed to isolate foreign literature, with its dangerous ideas. In practice, it became a haven for Soviet intellectuals during hard times.

"Won't it be dangerous to have an exhibition on censorship?" I asked. "Maybe," she responded, "but it's really important to do it. The Soviet Union is changing, and we have to make sure the process continues in the right direction." (She had already begun to do just that, mounting controversial exhibitions and involving herself in what would become a very high-profile project with German colleagues to identify and make accessible some spoils of World War II, German "trophy books," including at least one Gutenberg Bible, that had been hidden away in Russian libraries, disused churches, and cellars for decades.) So we did take on the censorship exhibition, and the Library for Foreign Literature became our first Mortenson partner.⁴

4 Look at this benign image of a reading room for children in the Library for Foreign Literature. I love to show this picture because it is superimposed upon a truly sinister image: we are looking at a haunted room. Before The Changes it housed the dreaded *spetskhran*, the highly restricted repository of forbidden books and magazines (found in all major Soviet libraries) that was off-limits for all but a few people with special permission to view an item, under close supervision. The transformation of this room, managed for so many decades by the Party and the secret police, into a reading room for children, the window now letting in the light, was Katya's not so subtle way of airing out the space, of exorcizing the ghosts. And she did this while the Soviet Union still existed.

Weeks after Katya's visit to Illinois, on August 19, 1991—the day the coup was launched—she signed an agreement with the BBC to mount a permanent exhibition in the Library, complete with BBC television newscasts.

5 She did not back off when the coup was announced; indeed, during the three days of the coup she allowed banned newspapers to use the Library's printing facilities to produce broadsheets. (A KGB officer, walking by the print shop, advised her to draw the curtains!) This library, a bridge already in Soviet times, was now launching itself as a Golden Gate among bridges.

(Those of us who think librarians lead dull lives might want to reconsider. As evidence I offer you one more story, told to me last year by one of our Colombian Mortenson Associates: he and a colleague were on the road delivering books to an outlying library in a small town. They were stopped by a gang of guerillas, who held him hostage at gunpoint for a couple of hours while his colleague was sent to the nearest town to buy them 60 lunches. All in a day's work, he said.)

Back to Russia: My husband, Harvey, and I were there during these fateful days of August 1991, and we experienced the coup in St. Petersburg, then still Leningrad. **6, 7, 8, 9** Scenes on the square where all the action was—crowds milling around, reading illegal broadsheets and a wide variety of posters—are seared into our memories. **10** Someone thrust this poster into my hands

and urged me to take it home; in case the coup succeeded, people would know what had been attempted here. (The text reads: "The new Bolshevik putsch will ruin Russia forever! Army! Defend your people against the descendants of hangmen and murderers!")⁶

Those windows that had begun to open in the late 1980s were vibrating in their frames by 1992. Ten years ago this month I attended a most disorienting event in Moscow, one that I still find difficult to believe; I find myself shaking my head as I tell you about it today. The words are even hard for me to pronounce as part of a single phrase: a religious rock concert in the Kremlin! **11** Here is the program, depicting St. Sergius, the patron saint of Moscow, whose 600th anniversary was being celebrated.

A few months later, in February 1993, I attended two more amazing events in Moscow. The first **12** was the opening of an exhibition on Russian Orthodox books at the Russian State Library (still known by its old name, the Lenin Library), blessed, as you see, by Alexii, Patriarch of Russia, and presided over by Aleksandr Rutskoï, then vice-president of the Russian Federation. (By the end of the year Rutskoï would be in prison for having supported the second coup attempt, in October 1993.) **13** The second event was a conference entitled "The KGB Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" at which former KGB officials in nicely tailored suits spoke, and were yelled at by an audience of former dissidents in jeans and leather jackets.

In May of 1993 Katya and I opened the censorship exhibition on which we had been working for the past two years. Our own Maurice Friedberg took part in the accompanying conference; and Dmitry Bobyshev, an eminent Russian poet whom we are fortunate to have on our faculty and who translates my talks so I can deliver them in the most elegant Russian, was there as well. **14** Russian TV covered the event, and there was even a special documentary program made about the exhibition.

A few days later we traveled to Riazan, a nearby city, with Natalia Solzhenitsyn, the famous writer's wife, to open another deeply symbolic exhibition that the Library had organized. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, still living in Vermont at that time, had taught school in Riazan for twelve years before his arrest and deportation to the gulag; the city treated his wife with awe and great respect. (The bishop of Riazan was there to bless the opening; this scene became very familiar to me during my travels in post-Soviet Russia.) This exhibition, mounted in many cities throughout Russia in the early 1990s, brought back to the country the books of many leading philosophers, religious thinkers, and others who had been banned during the Soviet period and whose works had been published by the YMCA Press in Paris. (Some YMCA Press materials are in the University Archives, here in our Library.)⁹

Our censorship exhibition moved to St. Petersburg in October, a few days after the second coup attempt. While in the city, Maurice and I were delighted to see this banner [15](#) advertising the very capitalist newspaper *Komersant* hanging over the street, juxtaposed nicely with a Marlboro advertisement. The slogan is a clever play on a Stalin phrase, “The cadres decide everything,” rendered here as “The cadres read the *Daily* and decide everything.”

In December 1993, I found myself in the city of Berat, Albania, [16](#) where sheep ambled peacefully past the public library. Inside, a librarian showed me a heap of discarded books, [17](#) unusable now that dictator Enver Hoxha was gone. Hoxha’s ideology, if you can call it that, had infected every page. His infamous bunkers are everywhere, [18](#) dotting the beautiful landscape like toadstools and reminding us—probably forever, as it would be too expensive to destroy them all—of his attempt to close off Albania from the rest of the world. Walls come in many shapes. Two years later it gave me great pleasure to see this picture [19](#) in a magazine depicting a building in Tirana bristling with satellite dishes.⁹⁰ There is a delicious and perverse symmetry here between the solid, round, cement bunkers designed to protect against everything foreign, and the light, round, metal dishes that let in everything foreign.

Back to Russia again: Our censorship exhibition moved to Tiumen’, in western Siberia, in May 1994, and to Ekaterinburg, in the Ural Mountains, in November 1995. In both cities our materials served as a backdrop against which local librarians created their own exhibitions out of their own more than ample stocks, as both had been places of exile in imperial and Soviet times. (Ekaterinburg is the city where the last tsar and his family were murdered.) The curators told me that preparing these exhibitions had been for them personally a painful and at the same time a healing experience, forcing them to face the reality of their past.

In October 1995, I saw a remarkable guest book in the Parliamentary Library in Prague, three pages of which tell that city’s story of the 20th century. My photographs are poor, but I wanted to show them to you anyway, as they depict three historic signatures. [20](#) The first entry in the book is the signature of Tomas Masaryk, first president of the Czech Republic, probably from his visit to the Library in 1919. The book was hidden in the basement through the Nazi and Communist years. [21](#) In 1990 Alexander Dubcek, the Prague Spring leader, signed the book; [22](#) and in June 1992, during his first presidential visit to the Library, Vaclav Havel signed with his characteristic heart.⁹¹

Back in Moscow, I want to show you three pictures that strike me as immensely significant windows. We are in the central public library in one of

Moscow’s districts in January 1996. [23](#) Director Marta Butkovskaia (a Mortenson Associate) stands with her collection of telephone books of Russian cities. This would be an ordinary enough photo in an American library, where phone numbers and other such information seem wholly innocent. But until a few short years ago no Russian library would have had such a collection for the public: phone books did exist, but they certainly were not accessible easily.

In December 1996, the Mortenson Center and FOKAL, the Soros Foundation in Haiti, began exploring a partnership. In Port-au-Prince Susan Schnuer, Katya, and I saw the extremes: horrific slums [24](#) and vibrant art [25](#). FOKAL was building bridges all over the island, as in this school [26](#), where the library would be transformed. (Katya, shown here enjoying the children, arranged to send a set of beautifully illustrated Russian children’s books to Haiti.) Michele Pierre-Louis, FOKAL’s director, has described the general situation and FOKAL’s aims in her 1997 Mortenson Lecture,⁹² so I won’t say more here, except to note with pleasure that our partnership is thriving, with a new team of Haitian Mortenson Associates here with us today.

One of the exhibitions on controversial subjects Katya was taking around Russia in the mid- to late 1990s was called “Education against Prejudice: Beyond the Pale: The History of Jews in Russia.” November 1997 found us in Cheboksary, the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Chuvashia, on the Volga, opening the exhibition at the National Museum. The Minister of Culture and the Poet Laureate of the Republic spoke at the opening, as did the head of the Jewish community in Cheboksary, a retired engineer, who gave us copies of his autobiography. This exhibition on the history of Russian Jews and anti-Semitism was opening windows all over the country.

On that same trip to Russia I visited two sites that brought together for me in a very visual way some random thoughts that had been floating in the back of my mind for the last few years. In the center of Moscow, near the new building of the Tretyakov Gallery, is a park where examples of Soviet-era sculpture have been gathered, [27, 28, 29, 30](#) abandoned statues standing or lying on their sides in a lovely setting. These are powerful symbols of the Soviet past, at least to the generations familiar with that past. But what about future generations, including the immediate post-Soviet generation? What about visitors from other countries? This is not a museum; there are no labels explaining the history and significance of each sculpture. How will future generations understand the meaning of these symbols? What can they learn from them if they can’t speak “Soviet”?

This park was in the news last month as Russian politicians considered removing the statue of the notorious Feliks Dzerzhinsky, “father of the K.G.B.,” and re-erecting it in front of the old K.G.B. building. At the end of

the month I read that the statues in the park have been placed upright again and “supplied with antiseptically factual plaques.”³¹ And a few days ago I heard that a member of the Duma wants to erect a statue of the last tsar in Dzerzhinsky’s place. I’ll have to revisit the park next time I’m in Moscow—will I find the tsar on that pedestal? I wonder if those new plaques are sufficient, from my point of view. I suspect not. And what message is conveyed by setting the statues upright, rather than leaving them as they were? Much for me to think about!

That day I also visited the Sakharov Museum, and I found to my immense satisfaction exhibits designed to teach people to understand “Soviet.” For example, these panels³¹, made of a filmy material, depict symbols of ideal socialism. Across the aisle is a very different display³²: printed documents, black type on white paper, telling about socialism as it really was in Stalin’s Soviet Union.

The next room in the Sakharov Museum is a vast, dark warehouse fitted from floor to ceiling with narrow shelves and file drawers.³³ Here are alphabetical lists of people executed. The file drawers contain as much information as could be gathered about these individuals.³⁴ Small photos of victims dot the shelves. Here and there we see a genuine item from the camps: a cell window, a prisoner’s uniform, a pickax used in the mines.

I was so impressed by this museum, and from that moment on, I began to look for similar examples in countries I visited—displays prepared by libraries and archives or, most often, prepared by museums. Needless to say, the road now took me to the darkest places. No windows, no bridges: just walls and islands terrible beyond imagination. I don’t suppose anyone enjoys such places. I have an extremely low tolerance for them, and these images haunt me at night. But I sought them out, perhaps obsessively, because I wanted to learn what people in various countries were being told about bad times in their own histories. I had always been fascinated by monuments, but now I looked at them with new eyes: what did they reveal about the past? Was the tremendously powerful aura of monuments being linked to attempts to explain the past as objectively as possible, or was this aura serving the needs of a particular group?

I found, not surprisingly, that it isn’t always easy to tell: these are very complex issues. But I began to realize how very important it is for democracies to give their citizens access to *all* of the country’s past, the shameful as well as the noble. In countries that are not free, the rulers control the imagery, and attempt to manipulate symbols to tell the story their way, forbidding or discouraging alternative versions. Opening access is an ongoing struggle even in democracies, of course, including this country. But the problem is far greater in countries where the local equivalent of the *New York Times* may

not report such an issue, where the government’s interpretation of history is the only acceptable one. Please bear with me while we look at a few more images from hell. (I have many more, but will spare you most of them!) First stop: August 1998, Buchenwald concentration camp, located in picturesque hills just outside Goethe’s beautiful city of Weimar, also the site, between the wars, of the short-lived Weimar Republic. What a wealth of symbolism here!

The setting itself is noteworthy: Weimar is in the eastern part of Germany and was thus in the Soviet zone of occupation, which became the German Democratic Republic. The wall surrounding the GDR came down along with the Berlin Wall. A few isolated objects remain along the former border between the two Germanys.³⁵ Here, near Eisenach, you can see amidst the bustle of the autobahn the tower that used to house enormous searchlights, and a guardhouse and guard tower, manned in the not-so-distant “old days” by young soldiers looking for people trying to get out of the GDR. The no man’s land is no longer visible; it must be imagined. There are no historical markers.

The Buchenwald site is a museum, and has been one since GDR times. This is what makes it so fascinating for me: the incredibly complex layers of history—Nazi, GDR and Soviet, post-Soviet German—each with its own interpretation of “the facts” (and I put “the facts” in quotation marks, because they keep changing!). You enter Buchenwald through this arch³⁶, under the cruel Nazi slogan “Jedem das Seine”: to each his own, to each what he deserves, to each what’s coming to him.³⁷ We see here one of the cell blocks³⁷. Inside^{38, 39} are memorials to the prisoners who lived and died there (the one you see commemorates a Protestant pastor who tried to protect Jews and others and was tortured and executed);⁴⁰ a memorial at the site of the Jewish barracks; and⁴¹ urns in the crematorium. Outside the camp⁴² we come to a massive, Soviet-style GDR memorial, with a text that recounts history with Soviet-style distortions;⁴³ and to the ash pits, now idyllic shallow depressions covered with velvety grass. All these sites became part of a vast, outdoor museum during the GDR era.

When Germany was reunified, the Federal Republic of Germany agreed to maintain all GDR monuments as they were, in perpetuity. This is good, I think, although I know there is, understandably, much grumbling at the expense. People need to see the symbols of each stratum as they were then. But, as I noted earlier, explanations are needed, and these are supplied in the excellent new museum exhibits at Buchenwald, where the viewer can review all the strata and view the history of the place in light of the latest historical research.

For me an especially stunning and visceral exhibit at Buchenwald is one still under construction, as it were, because historical, archeological, and forensic research is still in progress. ⁴⁴ I'm talking about the forest cemetery a few steps from the camp, the mass grave of victims of "Special Camp No. 2." Just after the war the Soviets found the setup at Buchenwald convenient for dealing with their own prisoners. The camp, the executions, and the graves were a secret, revealed only after The Changes. As bodies are discovered, each is marked with a polished stainless steel pole, creating a grim forest-within-a-forest in this beautiful, pastoral setting.

Back on the main road, let's give ourselves some comic relief ⁴⁵ by looking at a billboard I spotted the following month (September 1998) in Moscow, up in the Sparrow Hills by the university. There's a Russian proverb, *Liubish katat'sia, liubi i sanochki vozit'*, which means "if you love to go sledding, you'd better love to carry your sled up the hill too." This version says *Liubish katatsia, liubi nalogi plati'*—if you love to go sledding, you'd better love to pay taxes too. A public-service ad where once red banners with Party slogans used to hang! Russians are learning that in a democracy citizens must pay for roads and libraries, a lesson too many Americans forget.

More memorials now: in the year 2000 I seemed to stumble upon them wherever I went. A few miles off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa, lies Robben Island, ^{46, 47} the infamous prison where Nelson Mandela spent much of his life. When Susan and I were there, in February 2000, our tour guides were former inmates, bringing a special and poignant immediacy to the experience. (This was our first visit to the country, to initiate a project that later won Mellon Foundation funding and gave the Mortenson Center a splendid new partner, LIASA, the Library and Information Association of South Africa.)

Susan and I had had a similar experience the month before, in Vilnius, Lithuania, where former prisoners took us through a particularly grisly museum in the building that had housed the KGB prison during Soviet times. Local Soviet authorities attempted to cover up the execution chamber, but zealous Lithuanians refused to let this happen. Thanks to recent work of archeologists, the visitor sees the real floor, blood-stained and with some objects dropped by prisoners scattered on it, beneath the hastily erected false floor. You will perhaps be relieved to learn that I have no pictures to show you.

The city of Berlin is one gigantic symbol. In May 2000, I tried to capture a few of its perspectives. Die neue Wache, ⁴⁸ a 19th-century monument built on Unter den Linden Strasse, the Fifth Avenue of Berlin, to celebrate German imperial glory, has a new placard, installed after The Changes, detailing successive generations of victims from the Nazi and Soviet eras.

A few blocks away, on the square in front of the Humboldt University Library, a memorial by the artist Micha Ullmann (installed in 1994/95) commemorates the Nazi book-burning of May 1933. The memorial is difficult to photograph, at least for me: it is a glass-covered hole in the ground through which one sees, in the earth below, a chamber filled with empty bookstack units. The plaque quotes a familiar and prescient poem that Heinrich Heine wrote in 1820, incorporated into the memorial at Dachau concentration camp too:

*Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort
Wo man Buecher verbrennt,
Verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen
(That was just a prelude,
Where books are burned,
There, in the end, people will be burned too)*

One more scene from Berlin, from the Deutsches Musik-Archiv: ⁴⁹ librarian (and Mortenson Associate) Silke Breslau is holding two 78 rpm records hidden away during the Nazi years. In the brown envelope is a recording of Louis Armstrong playing "St. Louis Blues" and "Tiger Rag," both banned by the Nazis. In the white envelope is a recording of operatic arias by Ezio Pinza. It was sold under the counter in a Berlin shop during the Second World War. All records from the Victor Talking Machine Company were banned, so the proprietor placed a "Special Record" label over the Victor label to make this banned item less obvious.⁵⁰

Back in Russia in September 2000, I had two experiences I want to document here. The public library in Rostov-on-Don, not far from the Chechnya battlefields, had a lovely exhibition, "Human Rights through the Eyes of Children," organized by a local group. ^{50, 51} Kids had painted pictures illustrating various articles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. I liked the exhibition very much, but searched in vain for a picture about my personal favorite, Article 19 (free expression). "We didn't include that article," the organizer told me; "we thought the concept was too complex for children." I gulped and restrained myself, but went away quite agitated. Later that day I told a Russian friend, a noted human rights activist, about the incident, and he agreed that Article 19 wasn't appropriate for children. I vowed to talk and write about this as often as I could, and I have done so, in Russia and elsewhere. With all due respect to these good people, they are wrong: children can and should be introduced to the concept of free expression, before it's too late.

That same week I spent a few hours at the annual Moscow Book Fair, which began in the late Soviet era. This was the first time I had been in Moscow while the fair was on, and I wanted to see it, having written and spoken

about it often. (It was here that many Soviet citizens had their first—and often only—chance to touch foreign books. Western exhibitors expected the books to “walk out,” and were delighted when they did. Stories from the Moscow Book Fair were guaranteed to make lovers of freedom of expression weep.)

I am happy to report that in September 2000, I found no reason to weep. On the contrary, I smiled [52](#) when I saw Moscow address and telephone guides on display, as well as [53](#) an unaltered edition of an Oxford dictionary for students. In the mid-1980s this dictionary had been reprinted in English by a Soviet publisher with Soviet definitions of some key words—“communism,” “imperialism,” “socialism,” “capitalism”—replacing the original definitions, and with the consent of the Oxford rights editor. I’ve always wondered what Soviet users of this very popular dictionary thought if they happened to read those genuinely Soviet definitions in an English dictionary!¹⁰⁰

We are nearing the end of our journey now, but I want us to stop for a moment in Guatemala and then zip around the world once more to see four more of those memorials at the side of the road.

Guatemala is a special place for me, as my parents, Sol and Gertrude Tax, lived and worked there from 1933 through 1941, learning about life in the highland villages and building scholarly, cultural, and personal bridges of their own. My visits there are always highly emotional, and I travel around the country in the company of friendly ghosts along with Susan Schnuer plus our Mortenson partner Ana Cecilia Torres and a remarkable team of Mortenson Associates.

I want to show you two bridges in Guatemala, encountered on our visit in February 2001. The first (perhaps unlikely) bridge is the Central Bank of Guatemala, which operates a network of public libraries like this one [54](#) in Antigua, where we see young teachers reading. The second bridge is Ann Cameron, an American author of children’s books who lives in Panajachel, the town where my parents and older sister lived. Ann solicited donations and built the town a library. There was a fire, [55](#) of mysterious origin, but the town administration has cooperated, Ann has collected more money, and the library has a new building now. My parents would be so pleased.

On the final stretch of road we stop first at a memorial outside the new city of Zhuhai, China, located in one of the Special Economic Zones near Hong Kong. A local man has opened a house-museum, a private enterprise, in a village near the city. Susan and I visited the museum in November 2001, with Mortenson Associate Qin Jian.

The house is a mansion in the Chinese style, built around the turn of the last century by a wealthy local man. The villagers were proud of the man-

sion, and when the Red Guards were coming, they decided to protect it as well as they could from destruction. They covered over the fine decorations inside and outside. Their efforts were successful: the building was occupied but not destroyed. The museum director decided to restore the decorations, [56, 57](#) but to leave small portions as they were, to show visitors what had happened. It may be hard to spot those portions on these photos; I hope you can see what I’m talking about.

The next stop is another of those places where the earth is soaked with blood and the birds do not sing. I visited Katyn Forest, near Smolensk, Russia, on a sunny day last January [58](#). The snow was deep and pure white, the air completely still, and we were the only visitors that morning to the site of the massacre by the Soviets of more than 4,200 Polish officers in the spring of 1940. For decades the Soviets claimed that the Germans committed this crime, and it was only after The Changes that the truth came out. The memorial park, a Polish-Russian joint project, is still under construction. The Poles are quite far along with their memorials, [59](#) including an impressive wall of names and brief information, if available, about each officer. Visitors literally walk over the mass grave as they wander along the wall. Russian contributions to the park are coming, understandably, more slowly; they have many issues to work through as they plan their memorials.

In March of this year my road led me to an “island” like no other I have seen: the city of Kaliningrad, formerly Königsberg, a tiny dot of Russian territory surrounded completely by Lithuania and Poland. Kaliningrad is an ancient German port on the Baltic Sea. It is famed as the city of Emmanuel Kant, who is buried here in the cathedral [60, 61](#).

There was absolutely nothing Russian, or Soviet, about this place until the end of the Second World War. British and Soviet forces bombarded the city and the Germans defended it, and together they destroyed many of the ancient landmarks. Then the Soviets occupied the city. Stalin deported whatever local people survived and imported new inhabitants from various parts of the Soviet Union. Königsberg was gone, except for a handful of buildings; and Kaliningrad, named after the Old Bolshevik who was formal head of the Soviet state from 1919 until 1946, was born. As home of the Baltic Fleet the city was closed even to Soviet citizens: it was an island in both time and space, encircled by Soviet walls. The city is filled with ghosts. I certainly felt their presence, and so did the great Russian poet Joseph Brodskii, who was there briefly in 1964. In one of his poems about Königsberg/Kaliningrad he described the city as a place where “the trees whisper . . . in German.”¹⁰¹

Now Kaliningrad is open to the rest of the world, and there are some bridges to the past as well. [62](#) A few moldering books remind us of the library of

Kant's university, the Albertina, famous throughout Europe from medieval times on. I hope someone will do something about these books, and soon: they are a preservation nightmare. The city has a modern university with an Internet center funded by George Soros (one of 33 such centers he established at Russian universities). Thanks to this center there is a project to document what is left of old Königsberg and mount photographs on the Internet.³⁹ And Kaliningrad has become a model for Russia, having just passed what I believe is the country's first freedom of information act!

Finally, a few words about bridges. I've mentioned some—George Soros and his foundations, particularly in Russia and Haiti but in many other countries as well; the Library for Foreign Literature in Russia; our partners in Latin America and South Africa—and I want to add some others to the list that have been important in my life in recent years. This is by no means an exhaustive list; I plan to devote considerable space in the memoirs I hope to write to the dozens of organizations and individuals I have worked with personally. Let me now just say something about categories of bridges, with a few brief examples.

First, the really big bridges, the kind that span major bodies of water and carry steady streams of trains, buses, trucks, cars, and pedestrians on different levels. These are the foundations—Soros and Mellon, Carnegie and Ford, Bertelsmann, Gates, Getty, and others—and governments that support library-related projects as part of their foreign aid. In this country non-governmental organizations like IREX, the International Research and Exchanges Board, have played an extremely important role by serving as pass-through organizations—connecting links in the bridge system, if you will—winning government and foundation grants and re-granting the funds to universities and individuals to carry out specific projects.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of these large-scale, multimillion-dollar, institutional bridges, without which organizations like the Mortenson Center, and individuals like me, simply could not have functioned. They make it possible for us and our colleagues around the world to cross over the chasms that separate us and to work together. Professional associations, especially international ones like IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, also serve as extremely important bridges, providing through their conferences and activities opportunities for colleagues from around the world to meet and collaborate.

But there is another kind of bridge that is equally important, and without which the big bridges lead nowhere: the little footbridges, often shaky and creaky, frequently strung together with bailing wire and chewing gum, as they say. We come upon these bridges in unexpected places. No two are alike, and they are amazing in their local color and in their abundance.

I am talking, of course, about *people*, about the librarians and supporters of libraries I have met along the road. In their own modest ways they have changed the world for the better. They have enriched my life and lodged in my heart, and I am so proud that I have had the opportunity to work with these remarkable people. I could tell you so many bridge stories, hundreds of them, from my own experience or told to me by Mortenson Associates and others I've met along the road. Let me close by sharing with you two stories that I love.

The first story was told to Susan, Katya, and me by our Haitian partners. There is a library in Port au Prince called "Etoile Filante," Shooting Star 63, started by a group of young people in 1991, during the coup that deposed President Aristide. By the time we visited, at the end of 1996, it was a thriving institution with many readers, and with a small bookbinding business that brought income to the library. When they started Etoile Filante the founders, who lived in one of the city's worst slums, were barely literate themselves, but somehow they had figured out that reading and books were good things, and they insisted that they wanted a library. (They learned quickly what real reading is!) The Soros Foundation helped them get started, but the inspiration came from the young people, and they realized their dream by working against odds we can barely imagine. Etoile Filante is thriving today, one of a handful of fragile bridges in an island-country desperately in need of bridges.

The story of our Mortenson partner in Georgia (not the Peach State, but the former Soviet republic) is very different but equally remarkable. A small group of librarians educated in the United States, several of them at this University, returned home in the early '90s and started a continuing education center for Georgian librarians. Working together on their own time—all had full-time jobs—they got grants and persuaded a local university to give them space. They joined forces with colleagues in Armenia and Azerbaijan, their neighbors, and provided a neutral meeting-place for those two warring countries. Until The Changes all three were Soviet republics, and these librarians had been colleagues, meeting together frequently. Now they were all independent, and two of them had been engaged in a bitter war.

Susan and I were present at the first of these meetings, in Tbilisi, Georgia, in June 1998. One evening after dinner, as people were dancing to the irresistible music of the Caucasus, one of the participants from Azerbaijan said something to me that I'll never forget: "How can I dance with Armenians?" he asked, with anguish. "My son was killed in that war." He reflected for a moment, then sighed and said, "But these are my colleagues, librarians, and some of them are old friends from before, so I'll dance with them." And he did.

One of the leaders of this enterprise, Besiki Stvilia, is back at Illinois to get his Ph.D. in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and while he is here, he continues to work with his colleagues in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, by e-mail. Librarians in the three countries continue their seminars and training activities in all three places (with the active involvement of the American Library Association), and the Georgians are rebuilding their bridge to Russia as well.

Walter Mortenson was not a librarian, but he believed in librarians and in the bridges they could build, and through his gifts to the University of Illinois Library he enabled us to create something here that is unique and powerful. Together with our international partners, and with vital support from our U.S. partners—the Illinois State Library, the Council on Library and Information Resources, the Queens Borough Public Library, and others to join us, I hope—the Center, with the help of big bridges, is linking hundreds of small bridges into a network of truly unlimited potential. The network is far from comprehensive, of course, but I'm an incurable optimist, and I like to think that one day our bridges, together with many others, truly will span the walls and islands of this world. Libraries are full of windows—peaceful places along the road to civil society—and librarians are good, sturdy bridges.

- i Given to me by Professor Joan Huber, an old friend; her son was in Berlin when the Wall came down and he picked up this souvenir.
- ii Speech at the Gala Reception Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Foundations in Russia, Moscow, 7th October 1997.
- iii See Dr. Genieva's 1999 Mortenson Lecture, *Whither Russia? The Role of Libraries in the Transformation of a Society*.
- iv Harvey Choldin took these pictures. I shot most of the others accompanying this lectures, and I am no photographer! My apologies for their quality.
- v The poster is in the University Archives.
- vi See the Paul B. Anderson papers, including material on the YMCA Press, 1921-1982.
- vii Thanks to Elizabeth Talbot for showing me this picture.
- viii Thanks to Parliamentary Librarian Karel Sosna for posing for these pictures, and Mortenson Associate Pavla Kanska for verifying information about the signatures.
- ix *Haiti: Reading the Minds of Democracy*.
- x See the story by Steven Lee Myers, "Father of K.G.B. Might Return to Headquarters," *New York Times*, Sept. 17, 2002, p. A4; and "Moscow," by Richard Loutie, in the *New York Times* of September 29, 2002, in *The Sophisticated Traveler* magazine section, beginning on p. 28; quote on p. 32.
- xi At Dachau, you may recall, the sign on the entry arch reads "Arbeit macht frei," work makes you free.
- xii Information thanks to Silke Breslan.
- xiii I wrote about this incident in "Good Business, Bad Business, No Business: Selling Western Books to the Soviets," in *Books, Libraries and Information in Slavic and East European Studies*, ed. by Marianna Tax Choldin (New York: Russia Publishers, 1986), pp.254-71.
- xiv I first learned of Brodsky's Kaliningrad poems in Zinovy Zinik's "Letter from Kaliningrad," TLS (April 26, 2002), p. 15. The line quoted is from one of those poems, "Einem alten Architekten in Rom," included in Tamas Venclova's article, "Koenigsbergskii tekst' russkoi literatury i keniigsbergskie stikhi Iosifa Brodskogo," in *Kak rabotait stikhotvorenii Brodskogo* (Moskva: MLO, 2002), pp. 43-63. Thanks to Dmitry Bobyshev for bringing this article to my attention.
- xv See <http://www.milovsky-gallery.albertmarc.com>. The *New York Times* ran two stories about Kaliningrad recently; see Steven Lee Myers, "A Russian City Digs Up Its Past and Finds Germany" (August 13, 2002, New York edition, A4); and Sabrina Tavernise, "Europe Offers Eased Travel to Russians from Kaliningrad" (September 19, 2002, A5).



