

Chapter 2

My Parade in New York City

Gorby in New Jersey

We arrived at Kennedy Airport at 6:00 a.m. and were hustled off to New Jersey. We were greeted by Gordon Elliott and the Fox TV crew. At 7:00 a.m., I began knocking on doors. At the first house, a little boy looked out of the door window and called his mother: “Ma, Ma, the man that runs Russia is at our front door.” The mother, in her housecoat and curlers, came to the front door and said, “You’re the most important person who ever came to our front door.”

At the next house, the mother and father both came to the door and invited me into the kitchen. They called their neighbors to come over and meet me, and they offered me breakfast. I didn’t dare eat. They pretty much took care of my limited vocabulary: Good morning (Dobroe utro), How are you? (Kak vasi dela?),

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Thank you (Spasibo), You’re welcome (Pozalujsta), Pleased to meet you (Priyatno poznakomitsa), Good-by (Do svidanija). The Fox crew hustled me out of there before I blew my cover.

The high point of this show was when a truck driver screeched to a halt in the middle of the street. He jumped out of his big truck, plugged up the traffic, horns tooting. He turned around and said “Fungula” to the traffic. He turned to me and said, “I love you, Mr. Gorbachev, but I can’t speak Russian. I’m Italian,” I said, “Gorbachev can sing in Italian,” and I sang: “C’na luna mezz’u mare
Mamma mia m’a maritare”

The truck driver started to cry! When Fox TV saw what an impact I was making on the people of New Jersey, they said, “Let’s get a limo and turn this guy loose on New York to see what happens.”

Only in Manhattan

What ensued could only take place in Manhattan because it is so dense. The whole city was wired for the Gorbachev visit. It was on the news continually. Pictures of Raisa and Mikhail Gorbachev were on every television network and had been for days. This was Christmas time, and a song had been written to the tune of "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town."

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"You'd better watch out, you'd better not cry. You'd better stay home, I'm telling you why: Gorbachev is coming to town."

This tune accompanied broadcasts of the entrance of Raisa and Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev into New York from their plane as they were descending the stairs. It was on every TV network.

The limos arrived, and Gorby 2 began his own motorcade down the streets of Manhattan. I stood up in the bubble and waved to the crowds as we progressed. The New York cops came alongside on their motorcycles. They wanted to know: "Where is your Security?"

Gorby responded, "I don't need Security. I'm from Detroit."

The Irish cop said, "Christ, we need the Security." This was an Irish officer, O'Brian.

Gorby said, "My mother was a Callahan!"

The Gorbachev motorcade was on one street, and we were on another. The cops were calling each other, puzzled about the whole thing. There were more than 6000 cops on duty this day. The group with the Gorbachev motorcade was saying, "We've got Gorbachev."

And the group with me was saying, "We've got Gorbachev. Hell with you!"

Finally, the ones with me concluded, "You keep yours. We'll keep ours!"

They said to me, "You could be in danger."

And I replied, "This would be as good a day as any to die."

O'Brian said, "He's from Detroit."

And the other officers said, "Oh, sh*t!"

They took me to Bloomingdale's, and I got out of the limo and started shaking hands. Some iron workers who were up on top of a building called out. "What about the workers?"

I yelled back, "Come on down."

They did - about two hundred of them. I shook hands with every one of them. I wore my hand out. All I could think of was in both Russia and the United States, the workers, the people make this land go: the unions, the truckers, the crane operators, and the guy with the shovel in his hand, the workers. I shook hands with every one of them with my firmest hand shake.

One worker said, "This is a real leader. He gets out with the people and shakes your hand."

Gordon Elliott guided me through the crowds, and the cameras from Fox TV followed us. A Santa Claus was on the street ringing a bell. He wanted to take a picture with me. A crowd of about 200 people gathered. Santa

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pulled down his beard and kissed me on the head. He had no teeth. I told him, "I used to play Santa Claus, but now I'm a Communist trying to make a living." In fact, I played Santa Claus for 47 years.

We went to Times Square, and a man came out of the crowd with a hat on that made him look like he came out of the '40's. He said, "Mr. Gorbachev, I am from Poland" in a heavy accent. "I would like to buy you a hot dog."

I said, "What is this thing, hot dog? Do the Amerikanskis eat dogs?" Everyone laughed.

He said, "You don't understand. No dog in the bun,

just meat from a cow and a pig in a roll, with mustard, sauerkraut, pickles, and tomatoes.”

He goes up to the nearby wagon and buys a giant hot dog. People are gathering fast to watch me eat. The hot dog is so big my mouth barely goes around it. I took a bite slowly and then jumped on one foot and said in broken English: “This is a miracle. Americanskis eat dog, and it is so good.”

Everyone cheered, about 300 people, like mana from heaven had just arrived. I had yellow mustard all over my mouth. Then I took a bite of polish pickle. I said, “It’s so good, tomorrow we will attack Poland and take all of the pickles.

The crowd laughed and the Polish guy was happy. He said, “We just beat Russia with Polish pickles.”

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I was famished. When we got off the plane, we went straight to New Jersey without stopping for breakfast. This was my first food since we had left Los Angeles the night before. I was struck by the intense curiosity of the crowd and the warmth of their welcome.

It was time to move on. I loved standing up in the bubble of the limo, waving to the crowd. Adrian said that I must have had a past life in Rome as a Caesar, it came so naturally to me. Where else but in New York City could such a thing happen. People were in the streets everywhere, and the public enthusiasm for this momentous day in history made them eager to be a part of it.