

'Can You Top This?'



Dave and Margo Sinkevitch

"Can you top this?" Remember in grade school when each fall the teacher would assign a composition with the inevitable title, "What I did last summer." With a different twist, teacher Dave Sinkevitch of Heppner High School and his wife, Margo, have been making speeches, showing slides, even using the bulletin board in the high school classroom with a map of the trip, to help relate their summer vacation.

The adventure began last spring when Sinkevitch received a telephone call at the school from Jim Schmidt, director of one of 14 groups of singers for Continental Ministries.

Having made up his mind that whatever Schmidt wanted, he would probably agree to, Sinkevitch answered the call which was to take him and Margo across the United States and the Atlantic ocean, through the U.S.S.R., Bulgaria, and Rumania, and back again.

Continental Ministries began about 17 years ago when a man named Cam Floria had a dream: to send young people all over the world to sing and share the Gospel through music. Schmidt had met the Sinkevitches on a 1981 tour to Great Britain—Dave and Margo also met on the 1981 tour.

What they knew when they left rehearsal camp in Los Angeles last June was that they would spend five weeks on a bus with 23 other musicians, including a 10-12 piece band, their personal items, luggage, sound equipment, risers, and everything they needed for the concerts which were scheduled on their tour across the country.

Since the Sinkevitches had joined the group rather late, the group visa did not include them, and so they expected to leave the tour in New York. However, their plans for late summer fell through and the group visa somehow wasn't registered and had to be reapplied for. When they reached New York, they continued on into the iron curtain countries with the rest of the group and the inspirational words of St. Paul found in Timothy 4: 1-5.

What we knew, says Margo, is that although we were a Christian singing group, during our tour behind the iron curtain, we had no scheduled performances, no itinerary, or no idea even where the Churches were. Our mission was simply to learn what we could about the Churches and the people without endangering anyone. We could have been "walking on a chocolate coated bomb and never even have known it." We were registered as "C.M. Student Tours," and in each country, we had a tour guide who was with us all of the time we were in that country. Anniversary Tours arranged the trip through Russia where the government does allow some churches to operate. Churches must be "registered" with the government which means that they are permitted to hold worship services openly, Margo explains.

Following each service, the pastor, who is also licensed by the government, must file a report with the city listing worshippers who were in attendance and the Biblical reference for the sermon topic. No Sunday school or "in home Bible studies" are permitted.

The Bible is permitted as a history text only. "Evangelical preaching" which the Sinkevitches say is defined as using the "Bible as a guide to daily life" is illegal in Russia and therefore not permitted in registered churches. They say also that a member of the KGB, the Soviet secret police, is on the staff of each registered church—sometimes his identity is known to parishoners, sometimes not.

In Moscow, their first stop, they were invited to the Moscow Baptist Church, the only registered church in the city of eight million people.

It looked more like an apartment building from the outside than like a church, but they noted that it had a "fine choir," and a "nice organ." Their group was ushered into the balcony and told to "Smile. Don't move. Do as our choir does." Following the regular service, they were asked to sing, so they did perform a couple of numbers.

Although people are allowed to attend the Churches, few men and few young people were at the Church. It's probably a matter of economics, they surmised, because people usually forgo promotions and give up better paying jobs if they attend church regularly.

At first, we were surprised to discover that the government is sponsoring the renovation of several of the older style churches. Mainly, Dave explained, the restoration was designed to unveil something which were needed in the ancient days of the country—when people needed God. Now, Marx, Stalin, and Lenin are gods for the Russian people; they no longer need Christ.

Their tour group was kept busy sightseeing throughout Russia. At one point, when they arrived in a city, a church member happened to find their group and asked if they would come to their church to perform. When Schmidt asked the guide if they couldn't go there to sing for the people, they were told, "no," just that there were other plans for the group at that time, a tour of a space museum and a park.

From Moscow, they traveled to Kiev, then, by train across the border into Rumania. "Once we were in Rumania, it was easier to move around than in Russia, but getting in..."

David has a story which he says, sitting here, sounds funny, but over there at midnight, after having been on the train since 11 a.m., in an eastern block country, it wasn't funny. At the border between Russia and Rumania, they had to go through customs. Margo followed the luggage through with very little trouble, even the Bible she carried, which had been given to her by her father, was not questioned after she told the official that her father worked in Michigan. Some of the members of their group, Dave relates, had the film in their cameras exposed, and had to explain different items in their luggage, but Margo said that she was just "open, and friendly." She considered herself lucky, because the officials couldn't possibly check everyone.

And, while she was waiting, Dave was exchanging his Russian money because tourists are not allowed to take Russian currency from the country. We were waiting in line, he says, and when the first of our group reached the window, they closed it saying, "We are now out of American money." "Now, I was at the back of the line, so I didn't have any trouble believing that. The people at the front of the line, however, had a little difficulty since they could see stacks of American bills on the counter. But, we were in a foreign country. We didn't argue. We waited."

After he finally had exchanged all of his Russian money for American and was ready to go through customs, he was separated from the group and asked to go into a room which he describes as about 8' wide x 20' long x 30' high, furnished with three chairs, a bookcase with a mirror behind the shelves and about four books. After he was searched, and he reassured the guard that although Sinkevitch is a Lithuanian name, he did not know of any of his

family that remained there, and that the "American Baptist Credit Union" which issued his VISA card was a bank, the border guard told him, "O.K. You sit and wait and when I come back, you will tell me what you need to tell me."

By this time, he and the other members of the group had become accustomed to two-way mirrors in hotel rooms and to having people in elevators who simply rode up and down all day long to observe what went on in the elevator, so he surmised that he was probably being watched through the mirror behind the bookcase. When the guard returned, Dave assured him that he had nothing to hide and emptied his pockets to show a suitcase key, a

comb and the one thing they might object to—a one ruble coin. But, the guard wasn't bothered by that. "O.K., you go."

In Rumania their tour guide was an engineer who worked with the Rumanian version of the KGB since he was only a part-time tour guide, Margo explained, while we were in Rumania, we sang in more churches than in Russia or Bulgaria; "maybe just because he wasn't as aware of the tourist places to visit. We were all tired of sightseeing by now, anyway."

As they entered Rumania, director Schmidt was answering questions about the purpose of the group's visit to the country. He reassured the guards that they had left all of their sound equipment in the United States and had brought only the instruments which even if there were no performances, the musicians needed to practice daily to be able to play the return tour across the United States. He also told them that they had no contacts or lists of churches in Rumania, but if the opportunity should arise, if the group were asked, they would consider giving a performance. He then asked the tour guide, "Do you think such an opportunity will arise?" The tour guide replied simply, "No, I do not think so."

Most of the music which they performed behind the eastern block countries was traditional and formal including hymns and Christmas selections from their program. Throughout Rumania and Bulgaria, people would request that they sing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." In the United States, their program varies greatly from anthems, to some African, to popular rock Christian music.

Dave and Margo emphasize, that the Continental Singers concern was not "our courage" entering a country where western-style Christians are rare, but our concern was for Christians there who might be endangered by contact with us. People were generally "warm hearted and giving." Our group had taken along small gifts—scarves, teddy bears, and gum, but no religious articles to give as tokens of our good will.

We have learned since we've been home that a church where we sang in Arad in Rumania has been closed by the state.

When we came out of Bulgaria and were able to pray again in a restaurant before a meal, Margo said, we realized "how lucky we are here and that we must take advantage of our freedom. All governments are ordained by God, so our freedom is also God's grace."

ENERGY ANSWERS

FROM THE OSU EXTENSION SERVICE

Q. I want to add a sunspace to my home. How important is it for the addition to face south? - B.S., Eugene.

A. It's best-but not absolutely necessary-for the sunspace to face true south. If you shift the sunspace glazing 30 degrees east or west of true south you'll lose about 20 per cent of possible solar gain.

It's also important to consider how much the nearby buildings or trees will shade your addition. You may think you have a sunny location, but you need to measure when shading will occur by using a sunchart to learn exactly how sunny it is. Another good reason to make a sunchart is that one is required for you to claim a solar income tax credit from the State of Oregon.

Oregon State University Extension energy agents have information to help you make a sunchart, or you can contact a local solar equipment dealer. To obtain the name, address and phone number of the Extension energy agent nearest you, call the Morrow County office of the OSU Extension Service, 676-9642 or write to Energy Answers, OSU, Corvallis, OR 97331.

Q. When I leave a room for a short time should I switch off fluorescent lights? Does the power surge to switch the lights back on use more electricity than I've saved? - G.B., Corvallis.

A. There is common misconception that leaving fluorescent lights on uses less electricity than turning them off and on again. It is not true. The surge of power when fluorescent lights are switched on equals just seconds of lighting.

Frequent switching in old fluorescent systems would shorten the life of the starter and ballasts. But in new rapid start fluorescent systems, switching on and off has little effect on the life of the system.

Q. I'm getting ready to insulate my attic. Is there anything I should do to the attic first? - S.V., Portland

A. Glad you're planning ahead. It's a good idea to inspect the attic first, looking for moisture damage. Repair any leaks you find. Also plug areas where air can leak from inside the living space into the attic.

Inspect the electrical system, too. Be sure the wiring is in good condition and that fuses aren't overloaded. Insulating over substandard wiring can be a fire hazard.

Q. What can I do during the really cold weather to keep comfortable and at the same time keep my home heating costs from going clear out of sight? - D.B., Portland.

A. If you can, concentrate all your household activities except

sleeping in the kitchen and perhaps one other room. Heat only those rooms. If there are open doorways between these rooms and the rest of the house, hang blankets or quilts over the doorways. Hang Blankets or quilts over the windows, too.

OSU Extension energy agents and specialists will answer energy questions of interest to readers in this weekly column. Send your questions to Energy Answers, OSU, Corvallis, OR 97331. Include your name, address, and phone number. The OSU Extension Energy program is conducted in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Energy with funding from Bonneville Power Administration and the U.S. Department of Energy.

New DMV laws may help police

Oregon drivers who are able to get occupational permits after their driver licenses have been suspended will now have more trouble violating the occupational limits without getting caught.

Tony DeLorenzo, assistant administrator of the Motor Vehicles Division's Driver Services Branch, says in a recent DMV news release that the possibility of getting caught has increased because of one little-known part of the state's new get tough legislation that took effect July 1.

That section of the law allows DMV to provide police agencies with information about occupational permits issued to people in their communities. To date, 13 city police departments and Oregon State Police offices in 32 cities have asked to get the once-a-month listing of occupational permits issued to drivers in their cities.

The listing, DeLorenzo says, includes the driver's name, address, driver license number, and the exact routes, times of day and days of week a driver has been authorized to drive in order to keep a job.

Driving outside those limits means the driver may be cited by police for driving while suspended and DMV will take away the occupational permit through a specific record check for individual drivers but they had no way to know in advance the drivers issued occupational permits in their communities.

DMV received complaints from police and other safety groups that people with occupational permits often continued to drive on an almost unlimited basis because police did not know without a specific record check who in their area had been issued occupational permits.

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