

Goodbye, Kiev Book Excerpt
Author Thomas C Almond

"Dear Lyubov,

Thank you for your most recent letter. Thank you also for the photographs of you and Sasha at the river. It sounds like you had a wonderful time together. Swimming, cooking and eating shashlik and sunbathing all sound wonderful. It is great that he can enjoy his summer break from studies. Many of my fondest memories of childhood are of summer.

It has also been hot here. I am thankful my apartment has air-conditioning. I recently went to the beach where the weather was nice but refreshingly cooler. The Oregon coast is very beautiful with its mix of sandy beaches and sheer rock cliffs where powerful walls of water come to crash on the rocks only to be turned into tiny drops of water that blow away in the wind. I thought of you when I was there and how maybe someday we will watch the sunset on the western horizon together.

Of course like a normal summer I have been working a few extra shifts filling in for vacations. Like normal this time of year we are getting a lot of grass and brush fires. Last week we went to a fire that started in the grass and spread to a house. Fortunately the house was vacant and unoccupied as the fire pretty much destroyed the house.

I received my season football tickets from Oregon State University the other day and it is hard to believe that I will soon be going to the first game. Summer is really flying by. Lyubov

I find myself thinking of you and Sasha every day. Thank you so much for being a part of my life. I look forward to your next letter.

Take care, Tom

The highlight of my summer though was receiving a video from the agency of Lyubov and Sasha. In this video made at the agency I see Lyubov moving for the first time. At the start of the video she walks into the room with Sasha. She is walking away from the camera until she turns and sits down in a chair. But even walking away from the camera I get a first glimpse of the grace of her movement. She appears to almost glide across the floor.

When she sits in the chair and begins to speak. Sasha is standing at her side. She speaks in Russian and I do not understand everything she says to me in the video but that does not diminish my pleasure. Her voice is soft and yet strong. It is cute the way it seems to go up at the end of sentences. About half way through, Sasha obviously nervous on camera begins to play with Lyubov's hair. She has it tied back in a pony tail and when she entered the room I could see her long beautiful curls sway back and forth as she walked. Sasha speaks a little to me still twirling his mother's hair. At one point after Sasha had thanked me for the coat I had bought him Lyubov smiled. I believe that was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life. Little could I know then how much

more of a pleasure it would be to see her smile in person. It was a short video probably not much more than a minute but it was priceless to me. I will play it nearly everyday until I go to meet her. Often I play it over several times at one sitting.

As time went on I began more and more to think about her being here with me. Maybe I would be visiting one of the many beautiful places in Oregon and I would think of what it would be like to have her there with me. I would go to the beach or to Central Oregon where I had planned on moving in a few short years. I imagined how she might enjoy all of these places and how much I would enjoy sharing the splendor of Oregon with her and Sasha.

After the New Year I finally asked Lyubov if I could come to meet her in March during my Spring Break from Russian classes. She accepted and I was somewhat surprised when she suggested we meet in Kiev. I had always assumed we would meet in her hometown."