**Tributes and Pictures**

**Laura: The Founding and Evolution of the Institute for International Connections in Lithuania by** Rasa Bieliauskaite, Ph.D.

Laura Dodson was one of the first professionals who came to Lithuania after the restitution of Lithuanian Independency. For the first time Laura visited Lithuania together with Virginia Satir and her team in 1988. It was already possible to feel the restitution of our independence coming close.

The day of the restitution of Lithuania state independence came together with economical blockade and the stresses of huge social, economic and psychological changes. Laura organised the first and then the consecutive seminars in Druskininkai. The trainings were important help for Lithuania in difficult situation when our professional society was in the beginning of our independence movement. 1992-1996 Institute for International Connections (Denver) and Harmony centre, Lithuania organised a cycle of seminars on Satyr system teachings (150 hours) Laura was the heart of beginning to organise Jungian movement together with International Association  for Analytical Psychology (IAAP) and Lithuanian Society of C.G. Jung Analytical Psychology in 1996;  2000 - 2002 Vilnius university hosted the postgraduate program “Psychological Counselling of the Family which was based on the systemic family therapy.

Our professionals were thirsty for practical psychotherapeutic knowledge. But what Laura brought us was much more: it was the new experience of how a person can be heard, listened to and respected for his feelings, emotions, and wishes. It was new and nourishing for our souls and bodies. The series of seminars which were led by the teachers of Virginia Satir organisations brought us professional and personal experiences which were life changing. American people who wanted to study with those high-level professionals could come together to study, they paid for their education regular price and it covered the expenses of the seminars as American teacher voluntarily donated their work for free. It was especially important as encouraged us to feel really equal and a part of the international community. For me personally Laura was always an example of brave, very much alive, warm and generous person. Rest In Peace, dear Laura

Rasa Bieliauskaite, Ph.D.

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**Information about the Institute for International Connections (IIC) Dr. Alexander Cheryomukhin**

Information about the Institute for International Connections (IIC)

Virginia Satir and Laura Dodson where among the first US psychotherapists who ever visited Soviet Union in 1988 (Moscow and St. Petersburg in Russia, and Tbilisi in Republic of Georgia). Colleagues in several cities were eager to learn Virginia’s methodology and strengthen personal and professional ties with US counterparts. When Virginia died, Laura Dodson established a nonprofit organization, the Institute for International Connections, to bring Virginia’s work and support individuals, communities and organizations in former Soviet countries and beyond. Laura said, that she wanted to respond to specific requests and needs from international colleagues. Laura was interested in the Change Process and wanted to support people and cultures overcoming the crisis and becoming more fully human in parts of the world, where crisis and change were happening.

In the 90s Laura and the IIC sponsored annual conferences in Russia and Lithuania. Hundreds of participants shared their personal experiences and professional work, formed new partnerships and projects. After those meetings, Satir practitioners went and taught in various parts of Russia, Lithuania and other Baltic states, as well as in Ukraine, where they worked with survivors of Chernobyl nuclear disaster. At the same time, Laura and the IIC raised money and sponsored dozens of international colleagues to attend Satir Global’s conferences in the USA and to study at various mental health centers. Many of these colleagues became prominent mental health professionals, started their own training centers in Eastern Europe, such as Julia Gippenreiter, Natasha Toumashkova, and Anna Varga.

In 2000 colleagues from Azerbaijan (a former Soviet republic in the Caucasus between Iran, Turkey, Georgia and Caspian Sea) attended IIC’s annual conference in Russia and invited Laura to teach and do projects in their region. Since then the IIC hosted the first and largest conference in the region on working with survivors of war and trauma (in 2002), and coordinated and sponsored many projects and training opportunities. During some years 4-6 international training programs based on Virginia Satir’s work took place annually in Azerbaijan. Dozens of colleagues, leaders of civil society organizations, universities and community activists from Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Iran, Turkey, Tajikistan and other countries participated in this ever expanding community. Importantly, Laura sought ways to respond to their learning needs, circumstances and opportunities in their societies. In some countries people wanted to learn how to work with survivors of trauma; other groups of medical doctors wanted to train medical staff to better communicate and treat their patients; yet another group of civil society leaders asked for tools to strengthen a peacebuilding process and healing from multi-generational oppression. Laura always listened, discussed possible solutions with colleagues in the USA, developed very tailored projects, and engaged her colleagues and friends.

As a result of her passion, over the last 15 years multiple training programs were happening each year in several countries. Here are some successful examples:

1. **Azerbaijan**: master trainers like Jean McLendon, Janet Christie-Seely, Barbara Jo Brothers, Steven Young, Russell Haber, Laura Dodson herself, and others went multiple times, organized several annual conferences and multiple training sessions almost every quarter. Topics they covered included working with survivors of war and trauma, family therapy, organizational consulting, strengthening of civil society, cultural change and overcoming oppression. Steven Young did family reconstructions of several participants and investigated cultural and political roots that influence personal and social circumstances. Laura Dodson multiple times helped local people explore how history, culture, religion, personal experiences, perceptions and other factors create resources and opportunities for healing and change. Some IIC’s programs in Azerbaijan were co-sponsored by universities (such as Khazar University), international organizations (such as World Learning, Organization of Cooperation and Security in Europe, ISAR, and others). The IIC attracted participants from neighboring Turkey, Iran, Georgia, Ukraine, Tajikistan, and even Philippines, and provided them with scholarships. Also, the IIC created opportunities for several colleagues from Azerbaijan to come to the United States and participate in conferences and training programs hosted by Satir Global, IHLRN, Peoplemaking of Colorado, Satir Family Camp, Fathers Sons and Brothers, and others.
2. **Tajikistan**: Jeanne McLendon and Sasha Cheryomukhin led a major conference in Tajikistan (in Central Asia) and taught Virginia’s tools useful for supporting women survivors of suicide and their family members. Janet Christie Seely and Sasha Cheryomukhin provided several trainings for medical doctors and mental health professionals working with refugees, immigrants from Afghanistan, and Muslim communities. Overall, 4 major conferences and multiple workshops took place in Tajikistan
3. **Georgia**: Dozens of colleagues from Georgia attended training programs and conferences in Azerbaijan, and then the IIC organized many training opportunities in Tbilisi. For example, Mabs Mango and Dr. Mona Schatz gave workshops on Virginia’s work in early 2000s. During last decade Russell Haber taught there multiple times. During several years Steven Young and Sasha Cheryomukhin worked in Georgia with university professors, mental health professionals and leaders of various centers. At least a dozen of participants from Ukraine came and wanted to learn how to work with PTSD, and another group were eager to apply Virginia’s work to improve organizational leadership. Colleagues from Azerbaijan and Armenia also participated. Steven and Sasha offered multiple workshops tailored to the requests of different groups in Georgia and neighboring countries. They are asked to develop an in-depth Satir family therapy training in Georgia.
4. **Moldova**: several colleagues from Moldova attended conferences and workshops in Azerbaijan and they invited IIC to introduce Satir’s work to mental health professionals in their country. IIC sponsored at least three workshops in Moldova.
5. **Thailand**: Laura Dodson and Maureen Graves taught Virginia’s work over several years in various locations in Thailand. Participants included mental health practitioners, medical nurses and doctors, and community leaders. Laura was particularly asked to go in the wake of inter-religious violence in Thailand and she worked with leaders of various groups to heal and build vision of peaceful future.

Many of these programs helped establish cross-cultural friendships and partnerships, tailor Virginia’s tools to local populations and cultures, attracted the best trainers and experts, raised money and offered scholarships. Also, these programs offered hundreds of people in the USA and Canada to expand their horizons, visit and meet colleagues, learn about new cultures, teach and or experience Virginia’s work in multi-cultural contexts and populations.

It was Laura’s wish that this work continues. In the near future the organization intends to offer intensive trainings in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine, and establish the first certificate program in Satir Family Therapy in the region of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Dr. Alexander Cheryomukhin

Psychologist from Azerbaijan

Board Member, Institute for International Connections, IIC

**Laura: The Founding and Evolution of the Institute for International Connections in Russia by Natalia Toumashkova**

Laura: The Founding and Evolution of the Institute for International Connections in Russia

I saw Laura for the first time in 1988. She came to Moscow with her friend and colleague Virginia Satir. I remember them both on the stage - tall and gorgeous. They radiated warmth and kindness and self esteem - and professionalism. I think this was one of the first professional visits to post-soviet Russia. You had to be brave and very broad minded and unprejudiced to I break that wall of untrust and fear between the countries. Laura Dodson never feared anything.   
  
Next year she came to Russia again, bringing with her a group of the most courageous American colleagues, some with their families - spouses and children.  That’s how one of the first and very influential educational programs on Family Therapy started in the post-soviet Russia - Psychological Family Camps. Our American colleagues became our teachers and friends. Our children became part of this big international family. These Family Camps lasted in Russia till the year 2000. Every year Laura would bring to different cities in Russia big groups of American and then also European therapists from different schools - not only Family therapists - to teach and connect with Russian colleagues. Many would bring their families with them. For a week or 10 days we will have numerous workshops - and lots of fun. Then for a week or two Americans and Europeans would stay in Russian families and have their local personal experience.  
  
From the first meeting I was privileged to be Laura’s personal translator - and of cause simultaneously became her friend.  
  
Laura organized many opportunities for Russian practicing Psychologists to come to the USA to find new connections and professional possibilities. She organized trips to various universities and meetings with leading professionals in their fields. For example In 1991 due to her efforts I was the first Russian psychologist who was invited to The Harvard Medical School in Cambridge Mass., for the Special Fellowship program in Family therapy.  
  
Starting 1993 Laura organized The Program for Business Trainers - it was the first internationally certified education in business training in Russia.  
  
Last time I saw her in flesh was in 2002 in Baku at the Family Camp. (My younger daughter who grew up in that atmosphere of love, self-acceptance and intellectual generosity since she was 4 years old, came to this Camp as a translator.)  
  
We stayed in touch with Laura. She seemed to be the same Laura through all these years - beautiful, kind, loving, lively, open to any new experience. During the pandemic she eagerly joined our international on-line psychodrama project - Socio-Cultural Sociodrama. We - my colligues Victor Semyenov, Victor Zaretsky and me - started it with the topic «The Second World War» in 2020.   
  
Laura was planning to be part of our new on-line workshop at The 3d Teledrama Conference «From Awareness to Change Beyond Borders» at the end of October. She had registered for it, but later wrote that she could not come because she did not feel all that well.  But she asked me to keep her posted on whatever new and interesting was going to happen in my life…  
  
My dear precious friend, I will keep you posted. Always.  
  
  
Natalia Toumashkova  
January, 2023  
St-Petersburg, Russia

Photos from Kak (Orawan) in Thailand of Laura and friends' work in Thailand.     



