

## **Continental Meeting in Kiev**

**Kiev, Ukraine, 28th-31st May 1998**

**Diana Clift, Guildford, England**

At the end of May I was privileged to attend a Network conference in the capital city of a European country the size and population of France. It was a hot, beautiful weekend and the streets were packed with cheerful, well-dressed crowds in carnival mood: hundreds of market stalls, cafes, buskers, street theatre. It could have been any continental city, but this was Kiev. I blushed at my ignorance. When I queued for my visa in a barren basement room in Kensington, I envisaged dreariness and poverty. The last thing I expected was dancing in the street!

The conference, on integrating alternative therapies into orthodox health care, was organised by Valery Pokanevich and his colleagues at the Ukrainian Institute for Folk Medicine. Thanks to the zeal and vision of Valery and his team it is now possible for medical students to specialise in complementary medicine including Homeopathy, Acupuncture, and Herbalism. Kiev has had a school of Herbalism dating back more than 2,000 years. Like all other folk medicine, it was driven underground during the Communist era, but clearly the interest was always there or such a rapid revival in just the last five years would have been impossible.

The conference was attended by representatives from Russia, Ukraine, Britain, Germany, Holland, Ireland and the former Yugoslavia, and was actually featured on national television. The formal proceedings were hampered by the need for simultaneous translation and many of the papers were long and frankly dull. There were exceptions of course. One of the papers, entitled 'Autotrophic Geocosmic Nourishment Saves the Civilization', was bizarre to the point of total incomprehensibility and we were somewhat relieved when a Russian, whose paper was entitled 'Sexomatic as a Travel to the Speelbound Vacuum', failed to show up!

Then there was a Yugoslav double act, consisting of a healer, Ljubisa Stojanovic, and his side-kick/minder/ manager, Daniel, who told us again and again how Stojanovic could cure all diseases and perform remarkable paranormal acts. We were a bit put off by the hard sell, which is a shame because the results of tests on Stojanovic sounded really intriguing. We were all issued with free samples of his specially 'energised' creams and talismans, which we are now testing.

The item that really woke us up was a video (presented by Bep Bannenbergh-Hermans from Holland) of the Brazilian psychic surgeon, Arigo, plunging a kitchen knife into the eye-ball of a patient without anaesthesia and apparently without pain, bleeding or infection. That aroused some genuine debate as we had two orthodox surgeons in the group. The really amazing thing about the video was the queue of patients waiting for the same treatment!

It was clear that bureaucracy remains a major impediment to practice in alternative therapies throughout eastern Europe and they were astonished when we described the British legal tradition of 'caveat emptor' and the freedom this currently gives to genuine healers and charlatans alike. I was deeply moved by a Russian healer who spoke with great passion and emotion of the problems she and others encountered just to be allowed to practise.

My memories of the Kiev event, however, are overwhelmingly of the warmth and hospitality, the vodka and caviar, the boat trip along the river, singing and dancing amid the mosquitoes and the many new friendships made. And now I shall try some of Stojanovic's Revitalising and Weight Optimising creams and my friends can be the judge of their efficacy....pity he didn't have a Wealth Optimising cream!!

*Diana Clift is an environmentalist, therapist and blues singer.*