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“THE YEAR I WAS PETER THE GREAT”

A BROOKINGS BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. FRIEDMAN: Well, welcome everybody. This is -- I've been really looking forward to this. It's going to be a fund discussion with my friend, Marvin, on this really terrific new book, which I got to read this past week, "The Year I was Peter the Great," and this book works at many levels. At least it did for me. It's just a wonderful read to begin with, but first of all, it's amazing history. The best kind of history that journalists do the first draft about a pivotal year in world history, 1956, which when people say 1956, we usually just say Hungary, but we forget that 1956 was triggered by what was going on in Russia with Khrushchev, who when he saw this tall drink of a man for he firs time, said, he reminded him of Peter the Great, hence, the title.

But for me, as a journalist and a long-time foreign correspondent, the book is also just a reminder, for me, the best kind of foreign reporting. And the best kind of foreign reporters that don't just plunk down somewhere, but are true area specialists. Marvin studied Russian at college and at graduate school at Harvard and really brought to his reporting a deep insight. And last of all, it's a story of ambition and -- of a young man who grew up in a poor immigrant family; gets into a city university and aspires to be a writer and that's why my favorite graph, Marvin, in the book is -- because I had a teacher just like this that got me into journalism and Marvin tells this story. I marked it and then I -- bear with me just for one second because I insist on reading this. So Marvin -- I had a journalism professor, a teacher in high school and in 10th grade that changed my life. She was that teacher. Her name was Hattie Steinberg and to this day, her journalism class is the only course I've ever taken in journalism. At room 313 at St. Louis Park High School and not because I was that good, but because she was that good. And Marvin had a similar teacher. He wasn't as kind as Hattie was to me --

MR. KALB: She was not at all.

MR. FRIEDMAN: He was actually a literature teacher and Marvin tells this story

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of having had to submit a story -- a writing example for the class and I just want to read this page, Marvin, before we get into it. "Because he was asked to stand up by Professor Goodman. I felt a rush of pride. Goodman walks slowly from the rear of the room to the front. For a few moments, that seemed like an eternity. He looked at me and then asked for my paper, which, of course, I handed to him. Goodman examined the front page, still not saying a word. There was a strange look in his eyes. Was he going to echo the student compliments or was he going to cut loose with one of his characteristic condemnations? The silence lingered for a few moments, then with a dramatic flourish, he held the paper off and proclaimed, 'Kalb, this is a great story.' He paused. I smiled foolishly. 'A great story,' he continued, 'for the wastepaper basket.'" (Laughter) "And in one swift motion, he hurled the paper toward the basket, most of it going in. Some pages ending up on the floor. Goodman stared up at me. A weird grin on his face, a gasp of incredulity rose from the students. I stood before him and the students for only a second and then burst into tears and fled from the room, pausing only to pick up my briefcase. From the hallway, I heard Goodman shouting after me, 'Kalb,' he screamed, 'all you will ever be in life is a journalist.'" (Laughter)

That's so good, Marvin. That's so good. So Marvin start -- let's begin, why did you want to write this book now? You waited a long time to write this book, yet it was where you got your start. Tell me what was the idea about writing it now?

MR. KALB: Well, I think you get to a certain time in your life when family first and then friends and then ultimately your grandchildren press you to write down all of the things that you've been telling us at the dinner table. And I resisted for a long time and I didn't think journalists were supposed to write memoirs anyway. And then I ultimately yielded when my grandson and my granddaughter decided to put just a little bit of pressure on me and they knew exactly how to get to me. And the minute they began to suggest why not, I folded. The only reservation I had was that this was not to be a personal memoir.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Right.

MR. KALB: This was to be a professional memoir. It's supposed to be what it is that I experienced as a reporter. And actually, the book focuses on the early time in my life. The training, but then that one year in Russia, which was so incredibly special --

MR. FRIEDMAN: So set it up a little for the audience because for people that haven't read it. Just quickly your education and how you ended up playing Peter the Great in Moscow in 1956.

MR. KALB: Well --

MR. FRIEDMAN: And then we'll talk about the importance of the book.

MR. KALB: -- what happened was that I was doing graduate work. I was probably going to go on for a Ph.D. in Russian history. I was very interested in the subject. My dear brother who was sitting right back there, Bernard Kalb, he was the one who put the thought in my mind that I really ought to study Russian, the language. I was already interested in the country. And the two came together and through the last year or so of college and the first two years of graduate work, and I was very lucky. Harvard, at that time, had a Russian Research Center and it was loaded with some of the best professors on every aspect of --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Amazing names. Marshall Shulman, Pipes, I mean, there were an amazing list.

MR. KALB: -- all of these great guys and I really felt after two years I was well-trained and I was one of those people who were becoming what they called Russia specialists in those days. Some of the people in the audience will remember that those were times when people said, "know your enemy," and the enemy in those years was clearly the Soviet Union. And I went into the army then for couple of years. I was in army intelligence working on the Korea problem, of all things. And then I went back and pursuing my graduate work and then I was determined then to go on for my Ph.D.

And then I got a call from Marshall Shulman who was the deputy director of the Russian Research Center and he said, "There's an opportunity to go to Moscow and -- but

we've got to have somebody who speaks the language, knows about the country, has a top secret clearance and an leave in a week." And I said, "I'm ready to go." And I did leave in a week. It was a wonderful session, if you'll give me a little more time.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Absolutely, you have all the time you want, but your mother wasn't so keen on this.

MR. KALB: Well, no my mother was very hesitant and cautious, but my father, with his great sense of curiosity and adventure, he said, "Go for it," and I was going to go anyway, actually. And I was so absorbed with the idea of being in Russia. It was a tremendous thing. When you study it at the university, it's all academic and until you get there and until you talk to Russians and until you begin to feel what they feel, you're not really absorbing the essence of the country. But you know yourself from the Middle East, if you don't go, you don't know. You don't go, you don't know and I went very quickly, in any case.

On the way there, I had to stop at the State Department and there was a guy named Bob that gave me a security clearance. (Laughter) No, no --

MR. FRIEDMAN: This is a great scene in the book, yeah.

MR. KALB: -- it was a very interesting clearance. I mean, he came in and I went to his office. He said -- he wouldn't look up at me really. He kept writing or looking at papers. And then finally he looked up at me and he said, "Single, huh?" "Yes."

MR. FRIEDMAN: You know where this is going to go. (Laughs)

MR. KALB: "You like girls?" "Mm-hmm."

MR. FRIEDMAN: (Laughs)

MR. KALB: And then I began to feel uncomfortable because what does that got to do with going? And he said, "Ballet, do you like the ballet?" (Laughter) I said, "Yes, I love the ballet. I intend to go to the Bolshoi as often as I can." And he said, "That's the problem." He said, "They generally use ballerinas." Use ballerinas and then he said, "You know, knock at the door and sort of seduction and you got to be very careful because those pictures can

embarrass your family, embarrass your country," and I have to admit, at that time, two thoughts were running through my mind. One, he was absolutely right; two, ballerinas.

MR. FRIEDMAN: (Laughs) Right. It's so bad? (Laughs)

MR. KALB: Right.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Bolshoi.

MR. KALB: Anyway, there I went. The first day it was 42 below zero. I went down to Red Square and I noticed that there was a guy following me. Turned out to be a very young KGB fellow and I figured that if somebody likes ice cream, he can't be too bad. So I went into the GUM Department store and there was an ice cream stand there and I bought two ice cream cones and I just gave him one. (Laughter) And he took it. He began to lick. I began to lick. I thought it was wonderful. We were off and running.

Three weeks later, Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union delivered a remarkable speech, February 25, 1956. He brought together about 1,400 big shots and for four hours told them how horrible Joe Stalin was. That he was a criminal; he was a murderer; he was so bad that he almost lost the Soviet Union to the Nazis during World War II. He killed 90 percent of the officer corps of the Red Army. He was a disaster --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Before World War II?

MR. KALB: Yes, during 1939-1940. He was a disaster and what we learned later -- there were no foreigners in this room, but what we learned later was that so many of these people were Stalin's people and if Stalin was to be attacked, they become suddenly very vulnerable themselves. And some of them we learned later died of a heart attack right on the spot. Many people were seen popping nitroglycerine tablets. A number of them committed suicide when they went back to their hotel room. It was a terrible shock, but when the word got out, slowly, but definitely, that Stalin was being attacked by Nikita Khrushchev, the way the Russian people translated that was this terrible fear that we lived with; a heavy Russian overcoat of fear -- 3:00 o'clock in the morning, knock at the door being hauled off without

explanation, it simply killed, but that is now over and if it was over, they began to think also, Tom, that they were able to begin to think for themselves. Just a little bit, not too much --

MR. FRIEDMAN: but it seems that, that just filters Eastern Europe as well.

MR. KALB: Exactly, it was the first whiff of freedom that they had and the people in Eastern Europe in June in Poznan, Poland. There was an uprising and the Red Army was called in and crushed it. Czechoslovakia followed. It wasn't too bad in Czechoslovakia. They -- the student kind of shut the country down, but the army did not go in and kill people, but in Hungary, in October and November, the Hungarians took Khrushchev literally, that if were to have our individual freedom, that is what we want. We want it all the way. We want political freedom. We want the idea of having two parties. We wanted the idea of a free press. They raised that very specifically and Khrushchev then had the first of two fundamentally important decisions he had to make. The second was the Cuban Missile Crisis and to blow the missile out.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Mm-hmm.

MR. KALB: The first one was what does he do with Hungary? He could have allowed the Hungarians to do their thing, but think about that. That would mean that the Hungarians went independent. They broke out of the Warsaw pact. If they had done that within a matter of a month, if less, the Poles would have done it. If the Poles had done, then the Bulgarians would have done it and then the Romanians would have done it and the whole East European empire would have fallen apart.

If it had fallen apart, one of Khrushchev's concerns was that if that fell apart, the West would take advantage of our weakness and they would make moves against us. We would have to stop them. There could be a collision of East-West and a nuclear war and he didn't want that.

MR. FRIEDMAN: It's an amazing straddle because he's taking the lid off here and screwing it on tighter over here, all at the same time.

MR. KALB: What he tried to do them with both and what he had to do at the end of the day in November, sixth, I believe, was he sent the Red Army in. And they crushed the Hungarian revolution in a brutal way and the Hungarians lost many, many people and the Russians lost many people too, but that was never advertised to the Russian people. But when Khrushchev made that decision, he saved his job, but he profoundly disappointed the Russian people.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Mm-hmm.

MR. KALB: And in December at a reception -- Khrushchev was always going to receptions. I'll tell that story.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yes.

MR. KALB: He was always going to receptions and in December, what he said was, "Stalin, no one," I forgot the exact words, but the idea was that when we write the history of the Soviet Union, the name of Stalin will remain great. When we talk about Leninism, we will talk about Stalinism. And he suddenly took that whole wonderful whiff of freedom. He didn't totally crush it, but he sort of stuffed it back into a box and the Russian people knew very, very well that things were going to get sort of nasty once again and of course they did.

MR. FRIEDMAN: So you're a young diplomat in Moscow, (inaudible) you had a diplomatic passport. The American Ambassador Chip Bohlen --

MR. KALB: Yes.

MR. FRIEDMAN: -- is having a 4th of July reception.

MR. KALB: Ah, yes.

MR. FRIEDMAN: And who shows up but --

MR. KALB: Nikita.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Nikita Khrushchev.

MR. KALB: What we -- what we -- happened is Khrushchev kept going to these parties and we wondered at the embassy whether he would come to the American National Day

of Reception. And on July 3rd, the ambassador got word from the foreign ministry that Khrushchev and his entire politburo was going to come to pay their respects on the July 4th holiday.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Including --

MR. KALB: Yeah.

MR. FRIEDMAN: -- Marshal --

MR. KALB: Zhukov.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Mm-hmm.

MR. KALB: The marshal of the -- the minister of defense. So Ambassador Bohlen had three other people at the embassy, which was woefully understaffed, who spoke Russian and he's -- each one of us got a member of the politburo to look after and mine was Marshal Zhukov. Marshal Zhukov was about five foot five in height and width (laughter) and I was 6'3".

MR. FRIEDMAN: And how old was Marvin Kalb at the time?

MR. KALB: Twenty-six. And so I'm to look after Marshal Zhukov. I was a PFC in the United States Army and the idea of me looking after a Marshal in the Red Army was absurd. (Laughter) But I did it, I planned for it, I made a little speech for when we were introduced. And then I took him in the back and we had a marvelous 40-minute conversation --

MR. FRIEDMAN: But you also had a drinking problem.

MR. KALB: We had this wonderful conversation (laughter) and in the read that I gave on Zhukov, I found out this guy really liked his vodka and I didn't drink. So to avoid the start of World War III, I had to find a way of giving him vodka and giving me water and I enlisted the help of Tom, who was a Chinese-born butler (laughs) who worked --

MR. FRIEDMAN: (Laughs) You can't make --

MR. KALB: -- for the ambassador. Who worked for the ambassador and I went to see him and I said, "Tom, we've got a big problem. The Marshal likes vodka, I drink water;

how do we work it out?" And he came up with a marvelous tray that was sort of around like this and in and he would hold it this way. And when he came over to Marshal's (inaudible) to me, on this rim was the vodka and on this rim was the water. So that was the way he served vodka to the Marshal, water to me, and he had eight vodkas. Belted back like that, (laughter) right back. And I had eight waters. (Laughter)

And Khrushchev then signaled that he wanted us to leave and so the two of us walked over and Marshal Zhukov was a bit tipsy. And I noticed that and I stepped back for a minute and he said to Khrushchev, "Nikita Sergeivich," and he said, "I have finally found a young American who can drink like a Russian." (Laughter) Khrushchev thought that was very, very funny. He began to laugh, the whole politburo laughed, and then he began to call me Peter the Great because he asked me, "How tall are you?" I said, "I'm six centimeters shorter than Peter the Great." He loved that line and he began to call me that on a regular basis, whenever he saw me, even, Tom, years later when I went back for CBS. He would still -- he would sort of spot me.

MR. FRIEDMAN: (Laughs)

MR. KALB: I remember on one trip that Khrushchev made to Hungary -- no, I'm sorry, to Austria. And we were in Vienna and he would not allow the reporters to get near him, but he saw me and he said, "Vot eto Pytor Veliki," (laughter) and so I was allowed in. And do you remember the story about Khrushchev boasting after the U-2 spy plane was shot down? It was shot down at 52,000 feet and he called me over and said at one point -- there was one other reporter, too, a UPI reporter -- and he said, "We now have a missile that can shoot a fly in the sky at 60,000 feet." I got shoot and the fly in the -- but I wasn't sure about the fly in the sky because it was a very special expression, and he could see that in my face. So he called over an interpreter. He said, "Make sure that he understands what I'm saying.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Mm-hmm.

MR. KALB: I can shoot down anything up to 60,000 feet, we've got that kind of

missile.” That was a big story.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: That was a big story and I love the idea of being Peter the Great. It, you know, what the hell. (Laughter)

MR. FRIEDMAN: So, Marvin, one of the things you -- you know, it comes up throughout the book; you were keeping a journal. Which obviously, you were able to draw and for -- to (inaudible)

MR. KALB: I was keeping a journal. It was a terrible journal. I -- with sort of scraps of paper, but I definitely kept it. And in the writing of this book, it was an incredibly helpful tool.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Oh my gosh, yeah.

MR. KALB: Because I knew what day things happened.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Right.

MR. KALB: I knew --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: For example, if I had a really interesting conversation with somebody, I would write it down at --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: -- night, as best I --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, for sure.

MR. KALB: -- remembered it. And so when it came to writing the Peter the Great book, I was able to be absolutely sure about what was said to me at certain times, where I was.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: And I traveled all over the country. What was so --

MR. FRIEDMAN: I just want to stay in sequence --

MR. KALB: Yeah.

MR. FRIEDMAN: -- for a second. Before we go to the travel part, I want to -- because the reporter in me just loved this scene. It's how you begin -- because word gets out about Khrushchev's speech and it starts to radiate out.

MR. KALB: Oh, yes.

MR. FRIEDMAN: And you describe how different people are putting different pieces together. But then you're off doing your research about this Ukrainian and you find yourself in the library one day and a little bit of history gets made.

MR. KALB: It was -- it was a wonderful experience that had happened several times. I was doing research on a man named Sergei Simonovich Uvarov who was a minister of education under the Nicholas the first in the middle part of the 19th century. Bear with me. And what I was trying to do was to get into the Lenin Library to do research. And two or three nights a week, when I was finished with work, I would go down to the library and really try to get in and it was an effort and they kept turning me away. No foreigner was allowed into the Lenin Library. And I kept trying to make as many friends as I could with the librarians and there was finally one woman who was sort of kinder than the others and she allowed me to get in. And then once I was in, the question became, what would she give me to use? And she began to give me secondary sources. And I explained to her that for a Ph.D. at Harvard I needed primary sources. And well, she wouldn't go that far, but she did begin to give me material.

I was sitting in the Lenin Library, which the reading room is about the size of a football field. An immense library with a lot of rectangular tables. And everything is very "poryadochni" everything is very orderly and structured. And there were police around, but they never interfere. And these kids were serious about their work. And I was writing down my Uvarov information when I began to hear young Russians stand up and begin to denounce Communism.

MR. FRIEDMAN: This is in the Lenin Library?

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MR. KALB: In the Lenin Library. I was astonished, but I did not even raise my head. I kept my head down and just began to write everything that I heard. And they were denouncing Communism, Stalinism, which was okay then, but also Khrushchev, and also the corruption and the miserable living conditions and they were just letting it out. And then other young people stood up and then the whole place stood up. And then they got on top of the tables and began very demonstrably to rip up copies of Pravda and throw it down on the floor. I was watching a student rebellion and it was a remarkable sight and I tried to stay as close to the bottom of it all as possible, writing it all down. And at 10 o'clock, the library was shut down and I thought wrongly that all of these kids would pick themselves up, then go down into the street, and go to Red Square and do something. But they didn't. They simply vanished. I was very surprised about that and I was sort of standing there, saying, "What the heck do I do with this information?"

MR. FRIEDMAN: So what did you do?

MR. KALB: I walked as fast as I could to Spaso House, which is the home of the American ambassador. And because I had a diplomatic passport, I showed that to the Russian guard. That was no problem; he let me right through. And then the marines were standing back there, but that was no problem either because I lived in the same house called America House on the -- alongside the Moscow River.

MR. FRIEDMAN: And the marine recognized --

MR. KALB: So --

MR. FRIEDMAN: -- you.

MR. KALB: -- they recognize --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: -- me. I was able to get into Spaso House. I said, "Could I please speak to the ambassador?" If I were a real foreign service officer, as some of you in this room may know, that is not the right thing to do. You don't wake up the ambassador.

MR. FRIEDMAN: How old were you at this -- you're 25 still?

MR. KALB: Yeah. (Laughter) Like, I figured, "What the heck?"

MR. FRIEDMAN: (Laughs)

MR. KALB: I had this material that I thought was so fabulous and so interesting and I woke him up, he came down, he could not have been nicer. Was polite, wonderful, as he always was. And he kept taking notes and then suddenly he stopped and he said, "We got to go to the Embassy immediately," and he called a car and we whisked off and he then wrote about a 20-page long cable, which went to the State Department what was the first eyewitness reporting that the department had on how deeply and profoundly the Khrushchev speech began to affect the people.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: And that -- Tom, when -- if you went to Gorky Park and began, as I did very often, and you talked to people there, mostly young people, they were expressing their frustration with the system, but also their desire to learn. They realize -- and I don't know how, but they realized that they were so far behind.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: There was so much for them to pick up. And they were smart, they were literate, they were -- they were not -- their grandparents were illiterate, but they were not. They were literate and a lot of them were first class scientists, first class minds, and they knew they were being shortchanged profoundly. And they wanted change. One young Russian said to me at one point, he walked around in the rain for hours. And he looked at me at the end of it and he said, "If I thought it would do any good, if we thought it would do any good, we would all go down to Red Square now and start a revolution. But what good would it do? Nothing. They could crush us immediately," and that is true. And that's pretty much true with Putin, right?

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah. So what happened? So what did Ambassador Bohlen do with your little vignette?

MR. KALB: What he did was he wrote this long cable, sent it off to the department, the department was very happy to get it. And then Bohlen -- I'm not quite sure how to read it, but he treated me very, very well. He was extremely kind to me. But I was doing something for him, also. The embassy, as I said, was woefully understaffed and in 1956, for the first time since the late 1930s, sections of the Soviet Union were being opened up to foreigners. And I wanted very much to go to Kyiv, where my mother was born. I wanted to see that. And I also wanted to get into Central Asia. I was fascinated and I was determined to get there and they were just opening up and Bohlen could allow me to satisfy my curiosity and to go there, and so I did and I traveled by myself. I undoubtedly was followed at all times, but I really didn't give a hoot because there was nothing that I was doing that was wrong. I was looking, I was talking to people, and I was learning a lot, but most of it was here. I didn't write anything down. If I had written stuff down there, it would have all been picked up and used as proof that I was some kind of a spy.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Marvin, this little scene you described, though, it winds its way (laughs) from Chip Bohlen through the State Department over to the CIA and then comes out one day.

MR. KALB: What that -- thank you. In early June of 1956, I began to read in the New York Times first a full copy of the secret Khrushchev speech denouncing Stalin. That speech fell into the hands of the CIA. As a result of the Israelis picking it up in Warsaw, Poland. The Israelis got it from the Polls, gave it to the Americans. The Americans held it then for three months and then decided in June to release it. And this was part of an effort to further the thought in Russia, to keep it all going, and they thought that that was the best way of doing it. And maybe it was, I don't know, that's hard for me to judge. But they were definitely putting it out. And they also put out the story about how young Russians were in verbal rebellion against the Soviet system and I read that with a big grin on my face, (laughter) because I knew that I was the source on that -- on that bit of information and it was -- it was really important because it

was proof that the system was in turmoil. And you only had to be there with minimal sensitivity to pick up the rhythms and talks to the Russians and hear what they've got to say. And one of the things that used to be so remarkable to me was how few people did that.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: The -- that the embassy people, I guess because there were so few of them, they had responsibility at the embassy and they had to do it. But as the kid, I had no responsibility.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: I had to take care of the -- of the translations of the press in the morning, but then I was on my own. And if you were responsible -- if you were aware that you were not there to cause a problem, but if you were responsible, you could learn an enormous amount and --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Marvin --

MR. KALB: -- that's one of the things that I picked up later as a reporter. If you are somewhere, let them talk to you and you will learn so much, even in a closed-up society.

MR. FRIEDMAN: There's a song by rock group Neon Trees that has always been one of my favorite songs and mottos as a journalist and the main refrain is, "everybody talks." Like --

MR. KALB: Everybody talks.

MR. FRIEDMAN: And what you find, even when you go to a closed society, they know who's stealing --

MR. KALB: Yeah.

MR. FRIEDMAN: -- they know who's up, they know who's down. It can be the most closed society, but the maid tells the doorman tells the butler tells the professor.

MR. KALB: (Laughs)

MR. FRIEDMAN: And at the end of the day, everybody talks.

MR. KALB: Everyone talks and it's -- the Russians also have a very special grapevine, because when they read the Russian way -- in the old, when they read the -- and I think now, too. When they read the Russian press, they know what is baloney and they know what is true because they live it, they see it, they experience it every day -- and in those days, even more so. And there would be the usual way in which you would read what they call a leader piece, their lead editorial, and the first three columns was driveled with absolutely nothing and then there would be the word "odnako," which sort of means, "However, or hold on a second." And then if you read it carefully, it was remarkably revealing. You would find stories about the beginning of a political disagreement with the party phrased in such ways as former members of the Communist party expressing ideas which they probably picked up in the capitalist West, who's --

MR. FRIEDMAN: (Laughs)

MR. KALB: -- saying this, that, and the other. And then you would say, "Why are they saying that?" They're saying that because they're having an internal argument and there was a woman whom I deal with in the book, as well, named Anna Holcroft, who was my boss at the translation service called the Joint Press Reading Service. And Anna Holcroft had been working in and out of Moscow since 1922. There was nothing that the Russian could say to deceive her or to fool her; she could see right through them. And she taught us how to read the press, how to listen to Russian speech, how to figure out what was meaningful and, you know, what you could just get rid of very quickly.

MR. FRIEDMAN: I love that.

MR. KALB: I learned --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: -- enormous --

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: -- amounts from her.

MR. FRIEDMAN: I love that --

MR. KALB: She's wonderful.

MR. FRIEDMAN: -- description, that the editorials in Pravda, you know, the first three were unadulterated propaganda and then the more you read down, the next six revealed the truth. And as I read that, I was thinking, "That's six more paragraphs than you get from Fox News today." (Laughter) You know, we're just stuck with the first three. (Laughter) Oh, did I say that? I'm so sorry. (Laughter) Marvin, what have we learned about Russia today from this book? What would someone who's thinking and studying and trying to understand Putin's Russia learn from reading this book about Russia today?

MR. KALB: In 1956, the Russian people got the -- I use the word -- the first whiff of freedom, not in the way in which we understand it, but the way in which they understood it. And they understood it as a way of being released from fear. Whatever the opposite of fear was may not have been freedom, but it was for them a real freedom. When they didn't have to worry about being awakened in the middle of the night, when they -- when their children were not squealing on them. It was a terrible -- it was a dreadful society. It's a dreadful political system. And they finally had the feeling that they were moving toward maybe some romantic vision of Communism, but I don't think so. They were moving away from Communism and towards something that they read about or heard about what's going on in the West. They were fascinated by the West. In the middle of the night, they would listen to the Voice of America, which very wisely wouldn't load them with propaganda at all. They played jazz.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Mm-hmm.

MR. KALB: They played jazz and then they did biographies of jazz musicians and songwriters; very smart stuff. And that was in the middle of the night and they felt very good about that, connection to today. The thing that Putin does today with freedom is, he allows freedom that does not damage his control of the system. In other words, some people are allowed to travel -- and by the way, not all people. There used to be several years ago that

in Russia all people could travel; that's not the case anymore. Most people can, some do. At home, say whatever you like. Don't go out into the street, do not organize, do not say anything against Putin in the street. Because if you do, you're going to be arrested. And once you're arrested, who knows what's going to happen to you. In other words, he allows a little bit of what Khrushchev allowed in 1956. Gorbachev, when he came along in the mid-1980s, he was what they called a child of the 60s. What that meant, that expression meant that he was one of those who arose in the Khrushchev era.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

MR. KALB: Khrushchev inspired people like Gorbachev. Gorbachev could then try to introduce freedom, introduce a kind of socialist democracy in the late 1980s, but he failed. He failed and of course Yeltsin failed and the one who came in who was able to do two things: he was able to reestablish control over a country that was falling apart. And the Russian people liked that; they liked the idea of the -- feeling once again that they were powerful. The other thing that he was able to do was to contain this ambition for personal liberty. And right now, Tom, you have two schools of thought on modern day Russia and I was just up at the Shorenstein Center at Harvard just for a couple of days this week and we were talking about this and it broke down into two large groups. There's one group of optimists -- I'm one of them - - who believes that in 20 years, 30 years, at some point in the not too distant future, the Russian people are going to emerge out of the world in which they live today. And then there are the other people who are the pessimists who believe that the Russians simply require a Voshd, a very powerful leader who can sit on them and provide them with the leadership that they feel the Russian people require.

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