

Opinion

Soviets say Americans are enslaved by bills

Fifty or so former citizens of the Soviet Union who had been living in the United States went home the week before last.

When one of the returnees was asked why he was giving up the freedom living in the United States had provided him, he answered: "What freedom is there when the bills keep coming each month?"

I think the man is on to something here.

What freedom is there, indeed, when you go out to finance a new car and the capitalistic creeps down at the bank keep sending you payment due notices each month?

And what about monthly house payments? Wouldn't we all have a lot more freedom if we simply could pick out the house we wanted, move in and never have to fork over those worrisome payments.

It's a lot different in the Soviet Union. You don't have to worry about car payments because there aren't many cars available to buy, and even if there were, you couldn't afford one anyway. And housing, that's a lot simpler in the Soviet Union too. Who wants to worry about buying a house when the government can assign you a cozy two bedroom bungalow where you can live with your family, your spouse's family, Uncle Dimitry and God knows who else.

There's no reason to have a credit card if you live in the Soviet Union, either. What's there to charge? Toilet paper after you stood in line three hours to buy it?

If you live in Moscow, you could go



Lewis Grizzard

down to the big department store near Red Square. It's called Gum.

I was there once. What a choice Soviet shoppers have. There were piles of shoes, just in from Poland, the latest in 1935 fashion, perfect for walking down to the hard currency stores to watch Westerners go in and buy goods you can't afford.

And for the ladies, there were yards and yards of designer fabrics for making homemade dresses. One floral pattern caught my eye. Nothing makes bur-lap stand out like a floral pattern.

And cosmetics. Soviet women have a great choice of perfumes, Evening in Minsk, Evening in Minsk or Evening in Minsk.

The only bill you really have to worry about in the Soviet Union is the vodka bill. Since life in the Soviet Union is cold and drab and void of very much in entertainment or diversion, drinking vodka is the national pastime.

Soviet citizens drink so much vodka, as a matter of fact, the state has become concerned about rampant alcoholism and has raised the price of vodka and cut down on the hours it can be purchased. I can think of nothing worse than having to live but one day in the Soviet Union sober.

The Soviet propagandists use the return of the 50 or so from the United States as proof the West is just as decadent as they say it is. What they didn't mention is the fact that while 50 may have gone home, a half million others wouldn't go back at machine-gun point.

The poor fool wanted to go back to the Soviet Union because he didn't like having to pay his monthly bills.

The next time I feel like complaining about my own, I'll stop and think, and then thank the Lord I have the opportunity to pay them.

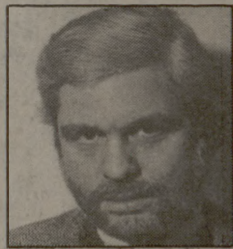
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Movies make memory murky

My desk was once in a movie. The desk, blue and made of metal, was replicated in a Hollywood studio. It was identical to the real thing and appeared in "All the President's Men." So, in somewhat the same way, did some of my Washington Post colleagues, including Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein and Benjamin Bradlee. They were replicated by Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman and Jason Robards. I thought my desk stole the show.

But the movie itself stole my memory.



Richard Cohen

Much of my recollection of the Watergate period comes from the movie and not from my own experience. What is true for me is also true for Bernstein, who called me a while back to check about a minor aspect of a certain Watergate experience. Did it actually happen, Bernstein asked, or was it just in the movie? Neither of us could remember.

For a movie, "All the President's Men" stuck pretty close to the truth. But certain decisions made by one editor at the Post were, for dramatic reasons, attributed to another. Filmmakers excuse this type of cinematic license by saying something like, "It's only a movie." That it's a movie is undeniable. It is at the word "only" that the statement collides with experience. Something about a movie obliterates reality. What we see, we believe.

Back in 1980, for instance, the Public Broadcasting Service aired a docudrama called "Death of a Princess." It alleged that rich Saudi Arabian women occasionally drove out into the desert for liaisons with paid lovers. The viewer saw women being driven out into the desert to meet men parked in waiting cars. But remember, these liaisons were only alleged. When the allegation was raised a second time in the docudrama, it was denied. This seems like balance -- an assertion, a denial. But the assertion is depicted, the denial merely stated. That's not balance. You cannot tell us that what we saw with our own eyes is not true.

I sometimes fall victim to this sort of thing. In a recent column comparing AIDS with syphilis, I wrote that Isak Dinesen had chronicled her fight against syphilis in her memoir, "Out of Africa." She had done no such thing. Her struggle was instead depicted in the movie of the same title.

My inability to distinguish between movies and what you might call real life has taken other forms. For instance, I no longer know if some of my recollections of, say, Paris come from my trips there or from the movies.

Given the power of film, it is not sur-

prising that President Reagan occasionally mistakes movies for reality. He reportedly said he filmed the location of a Nazi concentration camp, in fact, he had really seen one of it. (Reagan denies that he saw such thing.) Another time, Reagan inspired an audience with the story of a wartime hero who had gone down with his plane and was awarded a humorous Congressional Medal of Honor. Again, he took that exploit from the movies. Dana Andrews, the actor who went down with the plane,

Reagan has attributed the description of the armed forces to the description of a black galley hand at Pearl Harbor. In fact, the man existed and his exploits were depicted in a World War II propaganda film. The armed services were not desegregated until after the war. When that was pointed out to Reagan, he replied, "I remember the scene was very powerful." Indeed it was powerful than truth.

It's fun to take a shot at Reagan when he confuses movies with reality -- until you or I do the same thing. But Reagan is really more typical of Americans in this regard than he is different. He and Nancy watch at least two movies each weekend at Camp David. Not surprisingly, he has a cinematic view of America. No less surprisingly, it has a real political asset to him. After a version of America is also ours. We've seen the same movies.

But something about movies, from how they turn us into winners, makes them extremely powerful. They help something about the actors' selves. For instance, before my old movie made its screen debut, I had lunch with Alan Pakula, the director of "All the President's Men" while its filming progressed.

Pakula, who knows the power of film, decided to illustrate it at my expense. "What's the color of Woodward's hair?" he asked me about my friend and colleague. "Blond," I said. Pakula shook his head. "Redford's hair is blond. Woodward's is brown."

Maybe my desk wasn't blue after all. Copyright 1986, Washington Post Writers Group



After marriage, men become boys once again

Maybe someone can tell me what happens to men when they get married.

Debra Fowler

Guest Columnist

What happens to these supposedly strong and independent creatures who seemed to have it all together when they used to pick you up for a date?

If you ever overhear a group of women talking about their husbands, you'll find that married men seem to have quite a few common characteristics.

Look at married men when they're sick, for example.

When a man gets a cold, he jumps in bed and stays there for days, almost any woman will tell you. And the whining

that comes out of his sick room is unbelievable. He wants soup to unstuff his nose; he wants ice cream to make his throat feel better; he wants extra pillows so he can watch TV.

"Every move he makes is painful -- it must be, for all the moaning he does," a friend of mine said about her husband, who was, at the time, wallowing in misery with a sinus infection. "He says he doesn't sleep a wink all night -- but his snoring keeps me awake. And he claims nothing tastes good -- after he eats three pieces of pie.

"If I don't call him from work to check on him, he pouts," she declared. "It drives me crazy."

A man can play tackle for the Dallas Cowboys, drive an 18-wheeler 12 hours

a day, work construction or work on Wall Street -- it doesn't matter. When a stuffynose strikes, the world stops.

But -- their wives can have massive surgery and men still expect us to carry on business as usual.

I remember when I had a skiing accident and was laid up at home with a badly injured leg and ribs. My spouse, considerate though he is, finally called to check on me at 5 p.m.

"Are you doing all right?" he asked.

"No, I'm lying in a pool of blood at the bottom of the stairs," I answered.

"This is the first chance I've had all day to call you," he said. "I'll be home shortly. ... What are we fixing for dinner?"

"Gee, I don't know," I said, "and I've spent the entire day thinking about it. How do corn flakes strike you?"

Few married men I've ever met can keep up with their belongings. How they survived before they got married is a wonder to me.

"Have you seen my keys?" my spouse asks me almost every other day.

"Have you looked for them?" I used to respond.

"No," he'd say. "I figured that since you're always putting things away, I shouldn't waste my time looking -- you probably put them somewhere."

This used to annoy me, especially when I could see his keys from where I

happened to be sitting or standing. And they always were exactly where he threw them when he came through the door. After several years of pointing this out, however, I now just go get them and hand them to him. Why bother making a fuss when the next question will probably be:

"Have you seen my sunglasses? I know I left them right there."

Men seem to believe that we wives spend our leisure time rearranging their closets. Whenever they're not around, we sneak into their closets and begin hiding things -- as if we don't have enough to do.

Although I'm a firm believer in men doing their share of the household chores, I'm also a believer in never leaving a married man alone in the house for more than a day or two at a time.

What's neat and clean to him isn't necessarily neat and clean to his wife. I learned this after leaving my spouse alone for six weeks once. It will never happen again if I can help it.

When I returned home, strange objects were alive and multiplying in my refrigerator, which contained a two-year supply of TV dinners and hot dogs and several cartons of rotting milk.

My spouse had assured me on the phone that he'd kept the house neat. I didn't know until I got there, however, that "neat" meant he'd stacked six

week's worth of newspapers in a pile in the living room -- as opposed to having them throughout the house -- so that meant that the dirty clothes -- so many weeks old -- were, indeed, in the hamper.

"Why didn't you wash these things?" I asked in disgust.

"I didn't need them," was the simple and true answer. Who can argue with that?

Another thing most married women don't like to do is let their husbands do the grocery shopping. A bachelor used to shopping for decent food for himself. A married man, who usually doesn't plan the meals, isn't.

In addition to buying the roast chicken and the vegetables you want him to buy, he comes home with pickled artichokes, five bags of tortilla chips, seven jars of hot sauce and five cans of sardines. My mother actually has a special shelf in her pantry for my father's impulse food buys. Whenever he wants "something different," he slings the pantry door open, points his shelf and says "have at it, the balls and stuffed herring you bought last week await you."

But who's complaining? These are the things that add spice -- and interest -- to life.

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The Battalion

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