

State and Local

Author says American people don't understand Russian life

By Jamie Russell
Staff Writer

Many Americans stereotype Russia as a cold and dreary world in which to live, but in actuality it is quite the opposite, George Feifer said Thursday evening in the third part of a five-part lecture series for the 33rd Student Conference on National Affairs.

Feifer is the author of "Justice for Moscow," "Message of Moscow" and "Moscow Farewell," and he has lived in Russia "for a long time."

"We (Americans) have some pretty twisted ideas of Russia and its people," Feifer said. "Americans have this notion that Russians are these captive people yearning to be free."

"This American ideal is ignorant and unfortunate, Feifer said. Russians basically have two different lives — public (official) and private, he said.

"Russian life under the surface is vastly different," Feifer said. "On the surface it is drab and dreary, but underneath it is hot stuff bubbling."

Feifer spoke in light-hearted terms on life in Russia, telling Russian jokes to ease the seriousness of it all.

"Life for Russians is hard because it's always been hard," he said.

Feifer said there are many reasons why the people's life is essentially tragic.

First, Russian winters last about seven and a half months out of the year with only about 15 minutes of light per day offered during five of those months (Oct. through Feb.), he said.

Deprivation of light leads to depression, he said.

Another reason for the people's tragic lives is that the fear of

Russia's history weighs heavily upon them.

"About 20 million Russians died in World War II," Feifer said. "That's about 15 percent of their population."

The Russians have taken some serious blows in the past, he said, and in addition, the socialist system has proven unsuccessful.

The Russians do not want to have a capitalist society as Americans know it, Feifer said, but they do want to move on "to a higher level of civilization."

"The Russians no longer believe socialism will lead them to the promised land," Feifer said.

Disregarding their gloomy existence, Feifer stressed the warmth of the Russian people.

"In their private lives, Russians are full of warmth, friendship, hospitality and sentimentality," Feifer said. It is their official lives that one sees and then so quickly judges, he said.

Regarding work — their official lives — the average person is "amazingly unenthusiastic and unwilling," Feifer said.

It is impossible for people in Russia to move up and make it in the job world, so they work on feathering their nests, he said.

"It is because of the hardships (at work) that their private lives are warm, loving, easy and less inhibited," he said.

Children in Russia, despite the confined stereotype, are cherished, Feifer said.

"The children are precious, loved, protected — like in a cocoon," he said. "They grow up with an enormous emotional and physical strength."

Feifer said that Americans need to learn the facts about Russia to end the ignorant stereotypes.

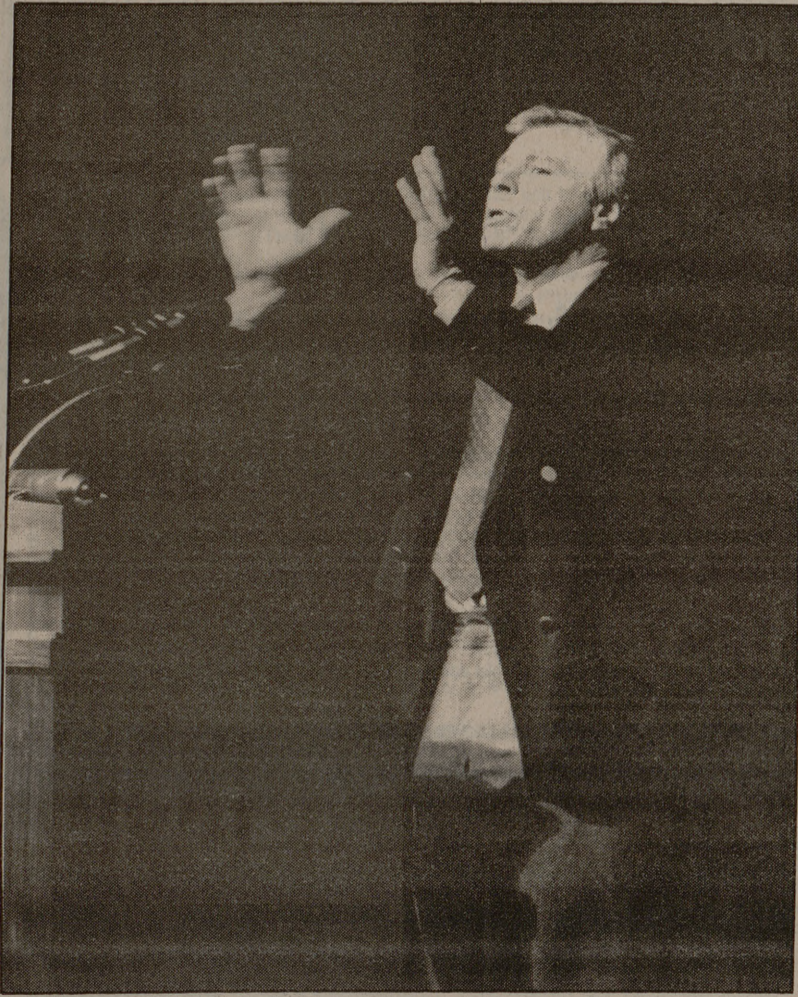


Photo by Sean Smith

Author George Feifer explains differences between the Soviet Union and the United States at SCONA's "Life in the U.S.S.R."

NASA astronaut tells A&M members of AIAA about shuttle missions

By Dean R. Sueltenfuss
Reporter

Space flight is a grand human experience, Dr. F. Story Musgrave, a scientist-astronaut from NASA, told members of the A&M chapter of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Thursday night.

"Space is so unique — you step out of yourself and watch yourself," he said.

Being in space is completely different from any experience on earth, he said.

A person moves so quickly in space that he is over a given part of the Earth for only a short time, he added.

"In terms of the human perception, your velocity vector totally overwhelms that of the Earth," he said.

Musgrave said that he would like to have an opportunity to go back into space when the space shuttle program gets underway again.

"I lost some dear colleagues and I lost some really close friends in the Challenger accident," he said. "But after those tears fell I thought I'd also lost my chance to go into space again."

Musgrave told the students how he felt about the space shuttle and how much it meant to him when he entered the spacecraft in preparation for lift-off.

"Machines are not just hunks of metal," he said. "You have an affection for these machines. They become a part of you."

"To be totally alone with that kind of airplane, that full of gas, and that much noise — and to know you're going to climb in that thing all by yourself and light 'em up — It's a fantastic experience."

"You don't just go in there and shut the door. You hesitate, you know — for about 10 seconds you just hang on — but you get in there

"I lost some dear colleagues and I lost some really close friends in the Challenger accident. But after those tears fell I thought I'd also lost my chance to go into space again."

— Dr. F. Story Musgrave,
NASA astronaut-scientist

and close the door and you've got two hours. Unfortunately, you've got two hours to lie on your back, and you're looking straight up at nothing — just blue sky.

"You are lying on a question mark. The question is, 'Am I going to light 'em off today?' You would like to know that when it gets to zero you're going to light 'em off and go somewhere."

Musgrave also displayed slides of himself working in space and going through training on Earth.

Some of the training on Earth is intended to simulate the conditions of space, he said. Training is done in an underwater chamber that gives the trainees a feeling of weightlessness similar to that of space, he added.

Some training is also done in the cargo area of a special airplane, he said. By going through a series of climbs and dives it is possible to achieve a condition of zero gravity for up to 30 seconds at a time, he said.

The earthbound training helps to prepare astronauts for space, but nothing is exactly like actually being in space, Musgrave said.

But Musgrave said he enjoys the Earth, too.

"I like this Earth," he said. "I really love this Earth."

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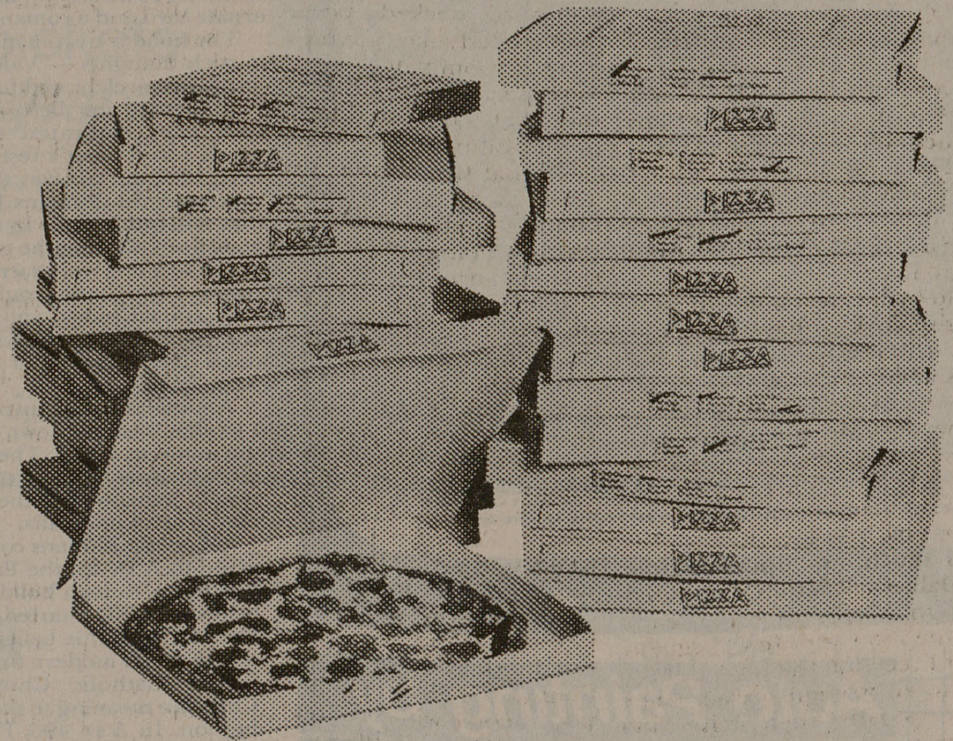
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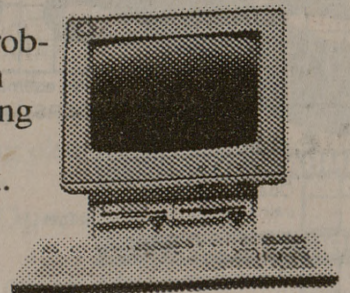


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