

THE NAUM CHERNOBELSKY CASE:

A Journal by Les AuCoin

Three Russian officials played a key role in the winning of Naum Chernobelsky's family's freedom -- Kremlin Adviser Georgi Arbatov, Ambassador Yuri Dubinin, and -- especially -- a young arms control and foreign policy specialist in the Soviet Embassy named Vitaly Churkin.

Five Americans worked tirelessly and bravely with me at different points over two years to secure the Chernobelsky family's release -- my Washington office aides, Elana Stampfer (daughter of Rabbi Joshua Stampfer of Portland) and Kimberly Danish, each of whom produced an avalanche of personal letters, telegrams, cables, and Congressionally co-signed letters to Soviet authorities; arranged my 6 a.m. international telephone calls to Moscow, Kiev, and Vinnitza, U.S.S.R.; and kept meticulous records of each step we took. Laurie Rogoway and Sandey Fields of the Jewish Federation of Portland, who organized community rallies and letter writing campaigns and who, at key points, provided wise and thoughtful guidance to activists throughout the community; and my daughter, Stacy, who broke a perplexing stall in our progress with a thrilling "letter drop" operation in Moscow.

Three other young American women played key support roles -- Julie Mendel, of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry, who arranged for translators for my telephone calls, and the two translators, Karmit Zysman and Robin Lieberman.

And then there was Raisa, the unstoppable Raisa Premysler, sister of Naum Chernobelsky. Raisa telephoned Naum and his wife throughout this ordeal, agonized over whether she should work for their release in a highly visible way and risk alienating Soviet authorities or work quietly and run another risk -- that Naum would become a forgotten name in an unopened file. It was extremely difficult but Raisa never gave up hope. She often sought my counsel on how visible to be in protesting her brother's treatment, and at a couple of sensitive moments I advised her to be quiet, and she was, saying she trusted me "like my own father." These were terms of endearment but with the fate of four people hanging in the balance, and aware that my own judgment could well prove wrong, I always felt a stab of anxiety in giving such advice.

1. Georgi Arbatov

This story begins with Georgi Arbatov, the head of the Kremlin's American policy think tank, the USA-Canada Institute. Arbatov is the guy who Ted Koppel routinely has on *Nightline* to explain Soviet policy to American television viewers. Narrow-set eyes, wide cheekbones, sharp chin, bald pate with a ring of wiry, wispy hair above his ears, Arbatov is shrewd, cranky and combative. His job in Moscow is to predict U.S. behavior for the Soviet leadership and provide analysis on which the Kremlin bases the marketing of its policies.

I met Arbatov in Moscow in 1985 during a congressional mission led by Rep. Tom Lantos (D-California) and Benjamin Gilman (R-New York). The delegation consisted almost exclusively of right-wingers and evangelical conservatives, save for me, the lone liberal. Gilman and Lantos and company evidently felt ridicule was the only thing the Russians understood. They were so singularly insulting to the Soviets, we were doomed to meetings with lesser functionaries from the largely meaningless Supreme Soviet. Lantos, in particular, consumed entire meetings, often allowing no other member of the delegation time to ask questions of our Soviet hosts, smothering the Russians with insults and accusations over the emigration question.

When we finally got to the end of the trip, Arbatov met with us -- the highest ranking official we were to meet. He was at his abrasive best, obviously having heard a great deal about our earlier meetings. Insult for insult, he matched Lantos and Gilman and the right-wingers. When one particularly offensive Lantos volley triggered an Arbatov colleague to countercharge that America had deliberately delayed opening an eastern front in World War II, letting the heroic Soviet army bleed needlessly, I slammed my hand on the table and told both sides they were acting like imbeciles. I pointed to a dozen children's finger paintings on Arbatov's wall. "It's the children -- yours and ours -- that our governments are endangering with their antagonisms. We ought to be concerned about our children, not some juvenile word game, trying to rewrite history to the advantage of one side or another. I'm ashamed of everything that's been said here and I feel this meeting has been a total waste of time."

This meeting ended disastrously but, while I couldn't have realized it at the time, to my great advantage, Arbatov would remember me.

It was probably too much to expect this trip to end without a final spectacle. The night before we flew home, Lantos and Gilman felt that the delegation should have a press conference at the American embassy. Normally, such a low-ranking delegation wouldn't rate a blip on the radar screen in the eyes of the international press. But, by coincidence, five days before we landed in the U.S.S.R., it was announced that the Soviets were returning to the arms talks in Geneva. It was the first cracking of ice in the glacial relations between the two sides, coming in a period of animosity unrivalled

since the Cuban crisis. Big news, indeed. And there we were, the first group of American congressmen to be on Soviet soil in the wake of the announcement.

The media opportunity was irresistible for Tom and Ben. Tom led off. I expected the worst, but I was aghast at the news hook he chose. He announced that the Congress would never agree to any arms control treaty without direct linkage to human rights issues, specifically, free emigration.

This was preposterous. The weight of the arms control issue was already possibly too heavy to be lifted. To insist that another ton be added to the load, rather than handled separately, was either naive or demagogic or a cynical ploy to poison the arms talks before they even began. These were the days of "Evil Empire" rhetoric and I had seen public emotions stampeded too many times. The last thing I wanted to do was to give Richard Perle any bright, new ideas or to have him believe a congressional constituency existed for such a poison pill.

I also was determined to prevent my travelling colleagues from giving even a fleeting impression to the Moscow authorities or the international press that 1) they packed sufficient power to make such a prediction, or 2) that their notions in any way represented the views of people like me who worked in the field of arms control or of the majority of the Members of Congress.

I attacked the "linkage" idea suddenly and savagely. The rift was dramatic enough to make the international wire. And I knew that meant that, in the Kremlin, the readers of congressional tea leaves would have some dissenting views to consider.

2. Raisa Premysler

During the following year, I was intensely involved in the fight to attach arms control amendments to defense legislation and wrote into law the first congressional arms control provision in history -- an amendment that withholds funds for flight tests of the U.S. anti-satellite weapon unless the President certifies that the Soviets have flight-tested their own. My House allies and I were also able to cap the MX missile production at 50, not an outright kill but a victory over the Reagan plan for several hundred of these first strike weapons.

At home, I would be asked often to speak about the arms race, the congressional efforts to restrain it, and my experiences in the Soviet Union. One of these events was at the Mittleman Community Center in southwest Portland. Near the front row, an intense, dark-haired woman nodded knowingly as I told how my wife, Susan, and I and some colleagues sped through the streets of Moscow at midnight one night to meet a group of Jewish refusnik families in a four-room apartment -- only to look out the sixth

floor window and see that we had been tailed by plainclothes police! I told the Mittleman audience that the police had not disrupted the meeting and that the American embassy reported no later harassment, but that I was amazed at the fearlessness of the refusniks throughout the meeting. The dark-haired woman nodded again and again.

It was Raisa Premysler. She rose to say that she was a Russian immigrant, that the Soviet system was based on fear and terror, and that her own family was a victim of this brutality. When her family applied to emigrate in 1979, she and her parents were permitted to do so, but her brother, Naum, and his wife and two children were inexplicably told at the last minute that they could not leave. Raisa spoke with a fierce moral force and her eyes flashed as she told how much she despised the Soviet system of gulags, KGB, sudden police searches, repression, and constant suspicion, everywhere. It was a performance I wouldn't forget.

About six months later, on February 4, 1986, I got a letter from Raisa asking for my help in winning Naum's release. A month later, Naum was arrested for "hooliganism, bribery, and misconduct in the workplace," and sentenced to five years at a labor camp. Over the next four months, I took Naum's case to Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Maryland), the co-chairman of the Helsinki Commission and Cooperation in Europe, sent a letter co-signed by 35 of my colleagues to Soviet emigration authorities, and even wrote a letter appealing to Mikail Gorbachev and Edward Shevardnadze, the foreign minister.

3. Vitaly Churkin

In late summer of that year, at my request, my military aide Bob Sherman arranged a meeting in my office with a young, impeccably tailored diplomat from the Soviet Embassy: Vitaly Churkin. Churkin spoke perfect English, with slight Oxford mannerisms. He was 40-ish, rosy cheeked, trim, with thick black horn rimmed glasses setting off his prematurely gray hair. He had a easy smile and a quick-witted, agile mind. He also seemed supremely self-confident on the outside and highly wired on the inside.

Churkin was an arms control expert and, following my victory with the ASAT flight test ban, Sherman had been discussing for some time with him the idea of the Soviets unilaterally dismantling their primitive ASAT system. We wanted to suggest to the Soviets that our ASAT flight test ban would be easier to protect if the ancient and unreliable Soviet SS-9 ASAT system -- deployed but untested for four years -- were simply dismantled. Churkin had said the idea would have a lot more force if it came directly from a Member of Congress, so I told Sherman to call him in for a conversation.

I said, look, your system is basically junk. You know it and I know it. Its technology is roughly equivalent to the deployed ASAT the United States had in the 1960s but abandoned because of its limitations. You haven't flight-

tested your weapon for four years and that's good because now I've put an American flight test ban into law so long as you keep your ban. Neither of our countries needs an arms race in anti-satellite weapons and counter-ASAT weapons or the instability this would cause by putting our early warning satellites at risk. But my amendment is a one-year budget rider, it has to be renewed each year, and I can't be confident that I'll be able to renew the amendment forever. So why don't you guys simply dismantle your defective system, like we did in the Seventies? It would stun the American right wing.

Nothing ever became of this idea but on the other hand, the Soviets still have not flight-tested their ASAT weapon to this day. Over the course of the following year, after checking Churkin out with the State Department, Churkin and Sherman and I had four or five other meetings. Some were sought by me, others by Churkin. They were always held in my office at 2159 Rayburn. In these discussions, I made a case for the Soviets to continue their unilateral nuclear test ban even after Ronald Reagan pushed ahead with U.S. testing, and I urged continued Soviet compliance with the terms of the SALT II treaty even though Reagan had decided to breach the treaty's ceilings.

We covered several other matters -- me making the case for Soviet restraint, Churkin making the point that Gorbachev had a clamorous military-industrial complex to deal with as well.

An interesting thing happened in one of our conversations about the ASAT flight test ban. The subject of ASATs other than the U.S.S.R.'s SS-9 system came up when I pointed out that a Soviet test of *any* ASAT would end the U.S. moratorium, under the terms of my amendment. Appreciating what I meant, Churkin pressed me to specify what I had in mind. Clearly he wanted to find out how much I -- and by inference, U.S. intelligence -- knew about Soviet ASAT activities beyond those of the SS-9. Not a bad response to my attempt to see what *I* might learn from *him*.

Only a fool would have trusted Churkin, or any other person the Soviet government would pick for an assignment in their Washington Embassy. I was extremely careful never to divulge classified information. Still, it was useful to discuss strategic doctrine with a Russian and the two of us found that we could deal with each other, however warily. ("Warily" is a good term. Sometimes as we talked, my gaze would drift away from Vitaly briefly and when I'd look back again, I'd always find his eyes darting and probing around my office.)

Still, it had become a good relationship toward the end 1986, and having gotten no responses from my other efforts on Naum Chernobelsky's case, I decided to enlist Churkin's help. After hearing the details of the case, he said it sounded very difficult. And for the first time, I was made to understand that first I would have to work to get Naum out of prison camp before a single thing could be done on his application to emigrate. After that dose of hard reality, though, Churkin said, "Let me look into it."

4. Speaker's Trip to Russia

In the early spring of 1987, three months after Jim Wright had been sworn in as the new Speaker of the House, the Soviet government invited him to visit Kiev and Moscow for his first mission as the third man in line to the Presidency. Wright accepted, and put together the highest ranking congressional delegation ever to go to the Soviet Union -- including the top three leaders of the House majority, the second ranking House Republican, three committee chairmen, several of the Speaker's appointed official congressional observers to the Geneva arms talks, and the chairmen of the Helsinki Commission on Human Rights. As one of the twenty Geneva observers, I was a part of the delegation.

The trip gave a promising opportunity to advance Naum's case. It was easy to see that the Soviets were trying to make a good impression on the new Speaker and this created great opportunities for Kremlin good will gestures. The delegation decided to be fully prepared, so it assembled detailed biographies of human rights cases to present to Gorbachev personally. I made sure that Naum's history was included in the Speaker's refusnik-document package. Copies of these documents were sent ahead; the originals stayed with us for personal delivery.

(A word here about my strategy for winning Naum's family's freedom. From the start, I figured that the only way to succeed was to raise Naum's visibility in a constructive way so that releasing him would fall into the category of an important gesture, whenever the Soviets chose to make such a gesture.)

The first break in the case came within days of arriving in Moscow with the Speaker, a fact that had to be more than simple coincidence. Naum was informed that, on reevaluation, the prosecutor had decided that Naum's sentence to five years in a labor camp was too severe and that he would be transferred to a kind of community work-release program in his home village of Vinnitza.

"*Churkin's been at work!*" I thought, remembering his point that before we could do anything, we had to get Naum out of his incarceration. It looked to me like Step One in a rather quick two-step process and then we'd be able to press for approval of the application to emigrate. I decided to press Naum's case verbally on any Soviet official I felt could be remotely helpful.

5. Georgi Arbatov, in Kiev

The Speaker's plane touched down first in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, because, as chance would have it, George Shultz was in Moscow on the day of

our scheduled arrival, for pivotal talks on the INF treaty. So we spent two days in Kiev so as not to trip over the Secretary of State as he tried to get a European missile agreement.

When we disembarked from our plane, Arbatov was there, on the tarmac, leading a huge welcoming party including a dozen grade school girls with bouquets of red carnations for each woman in our party. I'd never seen Arbatov smile before but there he was, grinning broadly.

Then he spotted Rep. Norm Dicks (D-Washington) who, along with me, had cabled ahead for permission to visit the crippled reactor at Chernobyl.

"Norm!," Arbatov cried, "You want to visit Chernobyl? It is fixed!" Then he gave Dicks a bear hug, slapping his back with his pudgy hands.

As we walked to the buses, Norm tried to introduce Arbatov to me. "Oh yes," the Russian said. "I know Mr. AuCoin *very well!*" I said to myself that this was going to be quite different than my first trip with Lantos and Gilman and I was doubly glad that I had spoken my mind when I had been here with them.

That evening, Ukrainian party officials put on a sumptuous banquet for us at a summer palace built for Catherine the Great. It was around midnight when the entertainment was over and we returned to the hotel. Soon after arriving there, Rep. Tom Downey (D-New York) grabbed Dicks and me by the arm and told us that Arbatov wanted to meet with the three of us in his room on the top floor, once he finished a private conversation there with the Speaker.

In about a half hour, word was sent down to us and we went to Arbatov's room, not entirely sure what was to come. Arbatov opened the door for us, he was alone in a four-room suite, and we kidded him about staying in "the Presidential Suite." Off the sitting room was a table loaded with locks and caviar sandwiches, wines and quality Vodkas. Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign didn't apply here.

Arbatov's purpose was to make sure that the three official Geneva observers in the Speaker's group understood the flexibility Gorbachev was prepared to bring to the arms control talks. The General Secretary had already said he would split the European missile question off from the Star Wars/offensive missile issues, and had stunned the Atlantic Alliance by taking Reagan's long-standing zero-zero proposal and saying, "yes!" All three of us stressed how crucial it was for the Kremlin to reach a deal with Reagan -- not because the INF treaty solved any major military problem but because it would put the imprimatur of Ronald Reagan on making arms control agreements with Moscow. That, we argued, would be important politically in America when the next Administration -- hopefully one that is serious about stopping the arms

race -- sits down with the Soviets to do real business. "Do you think Mikail Gorbachev does not understand this?" Arbatov asked. "He understands very well! Why else do you suppose he has made so many concessions?"

The meeting lasted for several hours, several sandwiches, and several glasses of the best Vodka I've encountered anywhere. It was an unusual chance to talk frankly with no political audience for anyone to play to and I was surprised at the candor. Jewish emigration came up toward the end of the meeting. Tom Downey said the Soviet leadership had to understand that the issue wasn't a device that anti-Russian elements in the United States were using against the Soviets, that instead it was a prerequisite in the eyes of a majority of Americans for far-reaching agreements on military, diplomatic and economic issues. The warmth of the evening ended right there. Arbatov's eyes turned to steel. "The trouble is, once we release *some* of these people," he said, "they just ask for more relatives, then more relatives, then still more. When does it ever end?" It doesn't, we told him, and reminded him that his government signed the Helsinki Agreement on Human Rights, which guarantees free emigration.

6. Georgi Arbatov, in Moscow

On the flight from Kiev to Moscow, I watched Arbatov sitting in a window seat, sixth row, second cabin, of our Air Force passenger jet with American flag decals on the tail section and "*The United States of America*" emblazoned on the fuselage. It was almost as incongruous as Norm Dicks and I visiting Chernobyl, which we had in fact done.

We immediately broke down into working groups at the Kremlin and I was a member of the arms control panel. Other panels were formed on human rights and regional conflicts. The Soviet side was an elite group, led by Marshal Sergei Akhromyev, the highest ranking Soviet military officer in the U.S.S.R., and Yevgeny Velikhov, Vice President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and a top Kremlin weapons adviser.

Arbatov and I nodded to each other as he slipped into his chair, 45 minutes late, with an armload of files and papers.

The Russians really unloaded on us. Reagan's provocative continuance of nuclear testing in the face of the Kremlin's 18-month unilateral moratorium. Reagan's deliberate violation of the terms of the SALT II treaty. The Reagan-Weinberger insistence on Star Wars and SDI's implicit threat to the ABM treaty.

When my turn came, I opened with a passionate appeal for Soviet patience, a point that met with a expression of complete derision by General Akhromyev. But I pressed on, describing congressional arms control

initiatives, some of which had been spectacularly successful, and urging his government to continue walking the extra mile, as it had done in the instance of its nuclear testing ban, and on the INF issue, I repeated what Norm and Tom and I had told Arbatov in Kiev: how important it was for a treaty to be sealed with *this* president, to set the stage for successful talks on more meaningful strategic issues with a more enlightened successor.

As the discussion turned to others, I leaned across the table and told Arbatov that I needed his help on an emigration case that was of great personal importance to me. I wrote down Naum's name and address and the names of his family members and slipped the note to him as he talked. He accepted it cheerfully, slipped the note into his pocket and said, "I'll look into it."

At the next day's panel meeting, Arbatov surprised me during the discussion by whispering to me across the table that he needed more "data" about the Chernobelsky family. It was as if he'd done some work on the matter overnight and found out he needed more information. I could have told him the case was fully documented in the packet presented by the Speaker but thought better of it. I was going to do exactly what he said. "How can I get it to you?" I asked, mindful that it was the afternoon of the last day before we were to depart for West Berlin. "Will you be at the Chili Feed?" he asked. The Speaker was putting on an authentic Texas chili feed at the American Embassy that evening and of course Sue and I were going to be there. "Give it to me then," he said.

Back at the hotel, I rushed to hand copy the details from the only copy of Naum's biography I had on my possession. Then Sue and I made it a point to be among the first to arrive at the embassy; I couldn't miss Arbatov. As people trickled in, I searched the room and there was no Georgi Arbatov. Then, minutes later, he simply materialized off my right shoulder. "Georgi!" I exclaimed. "Here's the document; remember, this is *very important* to me." Slipping the paper into his coat pocket, he said, "I can't promise anything. But I'll do what I can."

7. Yuri Dubinin, in Moscow

There had been a pleasant-looking, dignified man in civilian clothes sitting on the Soviet side of the arms control table who didn't speak, but watched intently as I spoke. As the discussion broke up one day, he came around the table and, saying nothing, shook my hand in both of his and smiled.

We were all then escorted into St. Catherine Hall, one of the most prestigious and stunningly beautiful rooms in the Kremlin, where we were treated to lavish luncheon with members of the Supreme Soviet.

I saw the dignified looking man again at the conclusion of the luncheon as I made my way around the huge horseshoe-shaped table. This time he spoke, in perfect English: "I was very impressed with your speech." Thanking him, I asked for his card, which I placed in my pocket, and I said that perhaps one day we would meet again, and then moved on.

Back in our room that night, I recounted the day's events to Sue and when I described this man, I remembered his card. Pulling it out of my jacket, I read, "*Yuri Dubinin, Ambassador to the United States.*" Of course it was Dubinin! I felt like a total schmuck. The next day, at the end of our meeting with Edward Shevernardze, the Foreign Minister, I presented a "peace quilt" made by the kids of Vose Elementary School in Beaverton, complete with silhouettes of their hands reaching out to the hands to Soviet children. Shevernardze seemed touched as I explained the symbols. "We should listen to our children," he said. Ambassador Dubinin came up to me after the meeting and said it was a perfect gesture. I profusely apologized for not recognizing him the day earlier, feebly laying it off on travel fatigue, but he shook it off with good humor. I was confident I had made a relationship that I could use to help the Chernobelskys. As it developed, that was true.

8. Georgi Arbatov, in Portland

Three months after returning from the Soviet Union, a heartening thing happened in Portland. I learned that Lewis and Clark College was sponsoring a conference on U.S.-Soviet relations and that a high ranking group of Russians would be there -- among them, *Georgi Arbatov!* I worked through Jim Gardner, the college president, and Joe Ha, a professor of international studies, to see if a private lunch could be arranged for just Arbatov and me, no staff, and no mention of the event on any schedule. To my delight, it was arranged for the Portland Hilton the day after I was to arrive at Portland International. Not only was it a thoroughly professional job by Lewis and Clark but, since it had been confirmed, it meant that Arbatov was not going to duck, he was going to see me.

As my flight approached Portland and I thought about the opportunity to get such a perfect follow-up meeting with Arbatov, for the first time I allowed myself to feel real optimism about Naum's freedom.

This was shattered as soon as I disembarked and found my field representative, Bernie Bottomly, in the terminal. Bernie reported that Raisa had confronted Arbatov earlier that evening and the conclusion of a panel discussion. It had been nasty. It ended with Raisa shouting into Arbatov's face, with television cameras running, "Why have you jailed my brother? Why won't you let me free?" Arbatov, Bernie told me, went apoplectic with rage and hissed at Raisa in Russian, "Your brother is scum, a rotten criminal!"

Now the luncheon that was designed to give a gigantic boost to the Chernobelsky case was instead going to be a damage control session. Euphoria one moment, despair the next. I knew what I had to do at the Hilton the next day.

The hotel had really outdone itself. We were set up in a room that would easily hold a luncheon for 40 people. It was empty except for an exquisitely set table in the middle of the cavernous space. Arbatov was already there, studying the view of Broadway below. A young waiter was stationed just outside the door, so excited that I thought his eyes were going to pop out of their sockets as he served us. Georgi and I exchanged pleasantries while we were served, then the well-instructed waiter closed the door and the two of us got down to business.

Arbatov wanted me to know that Raisa had done grave damage to her cause. She had caused him to lose face in front of his colleagues and she had elevated Naum's case in a highly visible, insulting way.

"Look," Arbatov said to me, "this woman has insulted my government and used me to do it. How is it possible for me to now to assist in the very case that she used for this slander, in front of my companions?" I worked very hard to be even tempered and brought his anger down slowly by telling him the pressure Raisa had been under and that I knew a man of his experience couldn't be affected one way or another by the action of a singular woman in Portland, Oregon. Over the course of a two-hour lunch, I mixed flattery, personalized pleas, and arguments showing how the image of the Soviet government would be served. In the end, he said that he would still help but that some time would have to pass first. "It's impossible now for us to act on his case alone. Such tactics as those last night cannot be seen to be rewarded." He then spoke of the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in October. He made a vague reference to humanitarian gestures "involving several people" at that time. Arbatov was telling me that the case was dead in the water for three to four months at least. I knew that his was a personal reaction to the confrontation with Raisa, not due to any real potential embarrassment in Moscow, but I got him to agree to stay with the case -- which was more than he was prepared to give me when the luncheon began.

9. Yuri Dubinin, in Washington

After a lengthy heart-to-heart telephone conversation with Raisa in which I explained what had happened with Arbatov, with great reluctance I advised her to avoid publicity for awhile, and then spent the next two months writing more high level letters, knowing that we were running on spinning wheels but determined to keep pressing.

But as the weeks wore on, I got more skeptical and anxious. How could I count on the vain Georgi Arbatov, even though he had to know he would have to deal with me in the years to come? I decided to open up a new channel and the Yuri Dubinin was going to be it.

In August, I had my office call Dubinin's and invite him to have lunch with me. The answer came back, but with a twist: he wanted *me* to have lunch with *him*, at the Soviet Embassy. I knew that I wouldn't be able to talk as freely as I had wanted, but what was the choice? After advising the State Department, I went, hoping for any progress I could get.

When I drove up to the steel gates of the embassy, as I was instructed, I could feel the electronic eye checking me out. Soon, the gates opened by remote control, and I drove in, parked, opened the embassy door myself and waited until a man my age in civilian clothes walked out through the security door that had been constructed with a one-way window. He was friendly enough and led me up the second floor where a table was set for four in the middle of a ballroom. To the side was a antique sofa, two matching chairs, and a coffee table. Another man was waiting. He was in civilian clothes but I was sure he was military. Soon Dubinin walked in and greeted me warmly.

The ambassador, it soon became evident, was no Anatoliy Dobrinyin, his predecessor, who spent 25 years in Washington and became the dean of the diplomatic corps before Gorbachev recalled him to Moscow in 1987 to take the Central Committee post of Secretary. Dubinin was a surprise choice as a replacement because he had been relatively obscure. His previous assignment was ambassador to Spain and if Dobrinyin was a mighty freighter plowing the diplomatic seas of Washington, his successor was seen as a rowboat. The speculation was that Gorbachev didn't need a policy man in Washington, that he wanted Dobrinyin's 25 years of American-watching experience at his fingertips in Moscow, that Dobrinyin and Shevernadze would call the tune from the Soviet Union. Thus, what was needed in Washington was a dependable man who could carry out instructions.

The luncheon did nothing to refute the speculation. All the ambassador wanted to talk about was the dispute between the two governments over each other's embassies. Because the construction delays and bugging devices discovered in the still incomplete U.S. embassy in Moscow, the State Department will not allow the Soviets into their lavish new facility on Mt. Alto in northwest Washington. Try as I might to steer the conversation to topical issues, the Ambassador simply wanted me to know the uncivilized hardships he and his people were being put through. In the presence of the two other men, who I did not know, I didn't feel that I could discuss the Chernobelsky case. So I was reduced to seizing my chance as the ambassador escorted me alone to the stairway to the lobby. I told him about the case, stressed its personal importance to me, explained that progress had stalled, and asked for his help. As I did so, I handed the biography to him. Without looking at it, he stuffed it in his pocket and said, evenly and not too convincingly, that he

would look into it. I returned to the office, depressed. I hadn't been responsive to the ambassador's top priority, better digs; and he hadn't been responsive to mine, a family's freedom. I saw no hope that Dubinin would be of any value to me. But, four months later, that turned out not to be completely true.

10. Interregnum

The months from August through December, 1987, were the most discouraging for me and maybe for Raisa, too, but she didn't say so to me. During this period, I sent letters to various high-level Soviet authorities, persuaded 100 of my colleagues to send individual letters to officials in Moscow, and wrote a follow-up letter to Arbatov. Throughout the Portland Jewish community, activists, following the lead Laurie Rogoway and Sandey Fields at the Jewish Federation of Portland, also stepped up their letter-writing campaign. Some felt the need to escalate the visibility of our cause by making Naum and his family the centerpiece of demonstrations and rallies. Gratefully, once explanations were given, they willingly accepted our quieter strategy. But from the Russian side, the only faintly positive thing that happened was that Naum was allowed to reaffirm his desire to emigrate, a step that he would have to take to be granted his release.

With no known sequence of events unfolding, I tried every angle that presented itself. On August 29, when Bob Sherman accompanied Rep. Downey and Rep. Bob Carr (D-Michigan) to Siberia to be the first Americans to inspect the controversial Krasnoyarsk radar, I had him hand deliver a letter to emigration authorities, routed through the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. In December, another staff aide, Stephen Anderson, traveled to eastern Russia with Oregon Agriculture Department Director Bob Buchanan. He also hand delivered a personal letter from me to a counselor of the Department of U.S.A., Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Then in September, Naum's wife telephoned Raisa with the news from the Soviet prosecutor that all charges against Naum had been dropped. This news was greeted by Raisa and my staff and me with great glee and I immediately began a new phase of my effort -- personal intercontinental telephone calls to the offices of OVIR, the Soviet emigration agency. I wanted to move quickly on the heels of Naum's good news but as time elapsed, it became clear that this only had been an announcement that the charges were *going to be dropped* -- not that they had been dropped. I even began to wonder if the announcement had just been a ruse and they were going to hold Chernobelsky until he was scheduled to be released.

Late that fall, I sent an update letter to Gorbachev in connection with the upcoming Washington summit. Several weeks earlier, Churkin had come to my office to tell me that he was being reassigned to Moscow, but he promised

to keep working on the Chernobelsky case. Still, I was uneasy about losing this personal channel.

11. Georgi Arbatov, at the White House

I was one of the White House's invited congressional guests for the Summit welcoming ceremony for Mikail and Raisa Gorbachev on the South Lawn. A stage was set up in front of the diplomatic entrance and the American VIPs were standing in one section on one side and the Soviet dignitaries were standing in another section on the other side. The press corps took positions on expansive bleachers behind the American dignitaries.

The Soviet delegation looked grim and somehow self-conscious as they stared across at the Americans -- except for Dobrinyin who wore a bright Scottish beret and a broad smile and frequently strode over to the U.S. side to jovially say hellos, shake hands, and slap backs.

I was shocked when Georgi Arbatov walked to the Soviet section. He was on a cane and limping badly. His face was grayish, he had lost weight, and he seemed in great pain. I watched him carefully as we all stood for about twenty minutes, waiting for the Gorbachevs; he seemed irritated as he spoke to colleagues.

Suddenly, the Reagans appeared and a black *Zil* limousine pulled up and stopped. Out popped the Gorbachevs, the General Secretary the picture of zest and energy, as usual. Both leaders gave impressive speeches amid the pomp and ceremony. Nancy and Raisa stood side by side below the stage but didn't once look at each other.

I kept my eye on Arbatov as the ceremony broke up and people made their way out. I came up beside him as he limped through the East Wing corridor toward the East Gate exit. There was none of the old vinegar in this man; he started talking to me as uneventfully as though we had never broken off a conversation. He seemed weary in seeing me but part of this may have had to do with the broken ankle he explained that he was walking on. For some reason, the doctors had not applied a cast; he was walking with it bandaged and stuffed in an oversized, high-topped military boot. When I asked him what he could tell me about Chernobelsky, he became so vague he was actually incoherent. He clearly did not want to discuss it. This bothered me, since I also knew by then that Arbatov had made a number of visits to the States without once trying to communicate with me. Still, by seeking him out and pressing him, I had made my point. On the other hand, he looked like a man who would retire because of health. If that would happen -- there would go another channel!

12. Telephone Calls to Russia

I pressed on with my telephone calls to the Soviet Union, six of them in all.

We had to be at the office to place the calls at 6 a.m. Washington time in order to reach the Soviet Union by 2 p.m. I learned that calling much later than that ran the serious risk of finding the offices closed in Kiev and in Vinnitza. On December 8, 1987, I sent my first telegram to the OVIR office in Moscow, Kiev, and Vinnitza, informing them that I would be telephoning them soon on behalf of the Chernobelsky family. The next day, I made my first call and had the good fortune to talk about Naum's case for ten minutes with Rudolf Kuznetzov, the OVIR director, in Moscow. Although he told me to call the OVIR offices in Vinnitza, I had succeeded in bringing an emigration case directly and personally to the attention of the top OVIR official in a rather extraordinary manner!

When I called the Vinnitza office, they told me there was no one in an official capacity present to talk to me and asked that I call back. These calls were maddening. Sometimes, as soon as my translator would say that, "Congressman Les AuCoin is calling from the United States," the Russian voice on the other end would feign a hearing loss and bellow, "Hallo? Hallo? Hallo?," and then hang up. At other times, no one would answer. On other occasions, we found ourselves reaching things like a hospital; OVIR had switched its phone number!

13. Yuri Dubinin, at a Washington Reception

By November 25, 1987, when the Soviet Life and Family Exhibition opened in Washington, I was increasingly suspicious that the announcement about the charges being dropped was, indeed, a ruse. And if the authorities were going to treat Chernobelsky's incarceration so cynically, who was to say that when it came to permission to emigrate, they wouldn't just let Naum rot in Vinnitza?

I had to assume Arbatov was unable now to help significantly, although the evidence was that he had been helpful and, if true, could be again. Dubinin was still worried about his vacant new embassy. I had to reach Churkin -- in Moscow, but how? I tried phoning, but he had no listing. Bob Sherman finally went through Gen. Rokke, the U.S. military attache at the American Embassy in Moscow. The officer searched his rolodex for numbers, many of which are not listed anywhere, and found one for Vitaly Churkin! But when Bob finally got him on the phone at 3 a.m., Washington time, it was the *wrong* Vitaly Churkin!

It was at this point that the mail brought Sue and me an invitation from Ambassador and Mrs. Yuri Dubinin to a special preview of the Soviet Life and Family Exhibition at the State Department Auditorium on Constitution Avenue. It was a high tech exhibition, timed just a few weeks after Gorbachev's state visit, featuring folk entertainment, foods, artwork, and exhibits that tried to frame human rights not by Western standards of personal freedom but by societal standards such as low-cost health care, education, and housing. Full color, blown-up, mounted photographs of the Speaker's delegation's visit to the Soviet Union greeted us as we came into the foyer. Unfortunately, there were few guests present and, of those, only a small fraction were Westerners. Sue and I made the rounds and then I finally spotted the ambassador.

When we went over to say hello, it probably was my imagination but I thought he was friendly but a bit distant. For some reason I couldn't comprehend, he spoke through an interpreter. We talked while watching a Georgian folk singing group so it was merely small talk between numbers. As I prepared to leave, I told him, "You know, my daughter is going to be visiting your country in January!" At this, Dubinin came to life. He beamed and said through the interpreter, "You must drop me a note when she is about to leave so that I can tell my people in Moscow!"

For the mini-semester of her senior year at Smith College, Stacy was taking a seventeen-day study tour that would take her to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, Moscow, and Leningrad. In the few short weeks leading up to her trip, I formed a plan.

I sent Dubinin the letter he had suggested and thanked him for the interest he had shown in my daughter's trip. I gave him the dates and the sponsoring group and thanked him in advance for "any courtesies that might be extended to Stacy and her group." Then came the most important point, which I tried to state as casually but compellingly as possible: "I hope Stacy might be able to meet Vitaly Churkin in Moscow. She knows that on many occasions Churkin and I had friendly and stimulating discussions on arms control during his assignment in Washington. It would be nice for her to meet a party official in Moscow who her father had worked with on substantive issues."

14. Stacy's Letter Drop in Moscow

I carefully briefed Stacy before she left -- on the Chernobelskys, on Churkin, and how vital it might prove to be if she could get through to Churkin with a very personal message, and how no one in her group could be told what was up if she actually made contact. I wrote a very personal letter of appeal to Churkin and Stacy sealed it in a plain, unaddressed envelop.

We knew we wouldn't hear from Stacy once she got into the Soviet Union, so we could only hope that my gambit would work, that Dubinin would use his influence to have Churkin look Stacy up.

Half way through the trip, our hopes were raised when the ambassador dropped me a note stating that he learned that Stacy had met Churkin briefly. Sue and I restrained ourselves because the circumstances of the meeting were unclear. They might have simply said hello in a mass meeting, they might have simply been in attendance at the same meeting, or the report simply might have been wrong!

Then, on the night of January 28th, Stacy called from New Jersey, after arriving from Moscow. After establishing that she was fine, had the experience of a lifetime, Sue and I, manning both extension phones, said, "Did you meet Churkin?"

"Yes!" Stacy shouted. She told us it happened on her last day in Moscow and she was so tired at that point, she almost "bagged the day" and rested at the hotel. But even though she had given up on Churkin, she joined her group for a meeting with three fairly routine functionaries to talk about international youth exchanges.

The three were on one side of a table in a large room and the Americans took seats on the other. Stacy noticed a man sitting off and away, someone who looked entirely different from the Russians at the table who were carrying the discussion. She said she *knew* it had to be Vitaly Churkin and she kept looking at him and when he would return the gaze, she beamed. For some reason he was cautious about introducing himself to the group by name and seemed to want to make sure he was in the right place. No one's name had been used in the introduction so Churkin waited until the discussion was going well and then butted in to say, "So tell me, where in the States are you all from?"

Stacy was just starting to pipe up with, "Washington, D.C.!", when her instructor cut off responses with a tart, "We're all from colleges in western Massachuttes." The woman told Stacy later that she was miffed because she was certain Churkin was KGB. Somewhat later, as the group was candidly discussing pluses and minuses of daily life in each country, Churkin tried again. "I used to live for awhile in Washington, D.C., and I know that bumper-to-bumper traffic can be bad."

Stacy pounced like a cat. "I've lived in Washington for 13 years and I can tell you at rush hour the 14th Street Bridge is simply impossible!" She turned and smiled at Churkin. Churkin just grinned. When the meeting broke up, he came up to Stacy and visited for a bit. Then he asked, "And how is your father?"

"Fine," she replied. "He wanted me to extend his personal greetings and" -- dropping her voice to a whisper while looking him in the eye -- "to deliver a personal note he has written to you."

At the suddenness of this, Churkin was so surprised Stacy thought he looked like he had been shot. The smile left his face and he seemed dumbfounded, probably wondering why the Soviet Ambassador in Washington would set him up for such an unorthodox message.

At this point in Stacy's story, Sue and I were jumping up and down, screaming into the phone!

My daughter whispered to Churkin that the note was in the cloakroom downstairs as everyone went down together. As they were slipping on their coats, Stacy went over to Churkin and handed him the envelop and told him she was pleased to meet him. The Russian put the note in his inside pocket so swiftly Stacy hardly saw him take it. Then he nodded, shook hands, and said goodbye.

15. Naum Chernobelsky Goes Home

Just over three months later, on April 7, 1988, Raisa telephoned to say that Naum had returned home, his sentence had officially been dropped! That day, I sent telegrams to the OVIR offices in Moscow, Kiev, and Vinnitza, acknowledging this development, and asking for that Chernobelsky's application to emigrate be approved.

I followed with another letter to Ambassador Dubinin, encouraging Naum's emigration and I made two more calls to the OVIR offices in Vinnitza. At last, I reached someone in the Vinnitza office who would talk to me. He listened to my request and said, "Tell Naum he needs to come in to the office to fill out some paperwork." We called Raisa right away and she passed the information on to Naum.

16. Emigration granted!

On June 2, Raisa telephoned me to report that Naum's request to emigrate has been approved.

17. Raisa Premsyler

Raisa called me as I walked through the doorway to my office on the morning of August 8, 1988. Naum had called her at 6 a.m. Oregon time, from

Vienna, to report that he was, at long last, on free soil. We both celebrated this wonderful news. After all the years of work: mission accomplished! In my years in Congress, I've done some big things and some smaller but important things. But nothing I've done in public life compares to saving this single family.