COBOL Course in Leningrad

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The story I'm now going to tell you deals with my visit as a teacher to Leningrad and the impressions I could gain there.

My manager told me in April 1978 to hold a COBOL course in Leningrad. That was something special to me for the very reason already that in those days Communism was still reigning in Leningrad while I had grown up in West Germany with another ideology. I'd already often had students in my Augsburg courses from Poland, Yugoslavia and CSSR, but teaching a class in the USSR itself was something new. I prepared myself very carefully for this course.

As to the experience itself, teaching such a course was certainly no challenge. I'd been active at NCR in EDP since 1968. I started my career as a programmer on the 315 system with the program generator BEST; after that, I was trained on the Century system with the operating system B1 and the programming language NEAT/3. I participated in Level 2 training and in courses on the operating systems B2, B3, B4 and VRX for the respective computer systems. I also thought some problem-solving courses in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. And I got to know the 8200 system with the IMOS operating system in different courses in Wichita. Of course I also learned the COBOL language. I felt therefore that I was experienced class.

On Monday the 7th of May I flew to Leningrad. Since the 9th of May in the Soviet Union was the day commemorating the victory over the Nazi system from Germany, the course had to start at the 10th of May. When at this morning, I was picked up at the hotel with a cab to the Education centre of the Commercial Seaport of Leningrad, I confess I was terribly excited. Sasha was a great help from the very beginning. If there were any difficulties, be it translating from German into Russian – we had yet another translator from Riga – be it the subject matter itself, Sasha masters every problem. It was he who created a good course atmosphere. All students worked together well, and I think every participant was able to draw a benefit for himself from this course.

Technically there were no problems. Sasha went out of his way to show me Leningrad and his sights. I noticed for example with great interest Sasha and the other fellow students viewed coffee or tea cups of various ages and rulers showcased in a room in the Pushkin Palace. Impressive! In addition, Sasha showed me Peterhof, Pavlovsk and the famous boulevard Nevsky Prospect. We often sat together long hours at the hotel beginning with technical details of the course and than talking about things that interested us about our countries.
Time flew very quickly and I was convinced to have the best job in a company most ideal to me.

I would also like to tell about a small mishap. On the way through the customs Sasha had brought me to the airfield. When I showed my passport and my luggage in the control

area I was suddenly sent by the customs officer in a delimited area. There the customs officer asked me, what I have done in Leningrad because I had so many specialised books thereby. I told that I have teached a COBOL class and showed him full of pictures book of the Winter Palace silver treasure cherished by me. The students had given me this book as a parting present dedicated to "the best teacher we ever had". From this moment on nobody spoke a word with me for a while. In my visa "TOURISM" had been noted as the purpose of the trip. Sometime later, this difficulty too was solved. They wished me a good trip, and off I jetted to Germany.