

A Note from the Author

This first portion of Chapter 11 takes place In Belavezha, Poland, on a trip my husband, Walter, and I took behind the Iron Curtain in June 1989, when the country was under Communist control. We were living in Germany, but had come to connect with a Belarusian–American dance group that was performing in the first Belarusian Festival allowed since the Communist take-over.

Up to this time, we had been followed in Prague, and encountered a military tank with water cannons near Gdansk; then my husband met clandestinely with dissidents in Bialystok. His work for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty complicated our encounters, since the Soviets considered the Radios to still be CIA-related.



Belarusian-American dance group

I felt I was handling the annoyances of informers well, with only a shrug or a comment. But the harassment escalated, and finally rattled me. One day, we were to meet the dance group for an outdoor performance in the town of Belavezha, at a small, end-of-the-line railroad station.

The motel the group was staying in was geared to attract Eastern bloc tourists visiting the Belavezha primeval forest. My first impression of the motel wasn't positive: it was a run-down, three-story, wooden structure in an industrial section of town. We'd decided to stay in the motel as a break from sleeping in the motor home, which we left in the motel's side parking lot.

As we entered the motel foyer, I cringed at the sight of sparse, blond, plasticized furniture, sitting on cracked linoleum. Our room wasn't much better, containing only a bed and a night-stand with one leg so short that it wobbled each time I touched it. The windows didn't work well, and the hard thin mattress was not inviting. As I surveyed the room, I began to think we'd made a mistake by not staying in the motor home. We were tired though, because of the late, clandestine meeting the previous night, so we set our bags down, changed, stretched out, and soon fell asleep.

At 4:00 a.m. I awoke, feeling that something was very wrong, and I needed to act on my intuition. (I call my intuitions "Angel Messages". Heeding them had protected us from danger several times.)

I tried to rouse Walter, shaking him and talking quietly:

"Walter, I think we need to go out and check the motor home."

"I'm not getting up in the dark to go outside. Check it yourself, if you want to." He turned away and went back to sleep.

I sat up in bed for a few minutes. I was hesitant to go by myself, although dawn was starting to lighten the sky. Okay, so he doesn't want to go out, I thought, but something is definitely wrong. If I put my coat on over my nightgown, I can go out and check, and then go back to sleep in the motor home.

As I walked out the front door, I was surprised to see a man smoking a cigarette at the far end of the motel. My suspicions grew, as I rounded the corner to where the motor home was parked. The motor home door was open! Looking in, I could see that food, papers and clothing were strewn about on the floor. For a moment, I stood there in shock. I closed the door, and dashed back inside the motel.

"Walter, wake up! Someone broke into the motor home!" This time I was shouting at him.

"What?" This news woke him up fast. He put on his clothes, while I quickly changed. Then we both rushed to the motor home to check the damage. Not much seemed to be missing, except for a box of cocoa and some vitamins. Someone had used the toilet, and had not bothered flushing it - which seemed strange. It reminded me of an animal purposely violating another's territory to signal its dominance.

"We'll have to report the break-in to the police," Walter said.

"I don't know, I have a feeling it might have been the police who did this. I think that man I saw smoking at the side of the building was a lookout and alerted them to my coming." I thought if we'd gone out right away, when I sensed danger, we might have prevented the break-in; but it wasn't the time to mention that.

Pointing to a red car next to our motor home, Walter said, "Joanne, that can't be, this car has its door open, too, and must have been burglarized."

"I don't know, but in the last Ludlum spy novel I read, the same thing happened. They broke into another car just to make it appear that the first one

wasn't a police action. I'll bet they bugged our motor home."

"Oh, for heaven's sakes, stay here, while I go inside and make the call," Walter said. He was obviously upset with what he thought was my foolish thinking, let alone the burglary. But I was upset too, and felt very vulnerable.

Two police cars and six policemen responded to Walter's telephone call. It seemed a bit of an over-kill. They asked questions about why we were there, and what we were doing.

Soon after, some of the dance group members started coming out of the motel, and began asking what had happened. The local students, however, seemed to take this kind of harassment in stride, and exchanged quiet, knowing looks. It was, after all, part of their daily life.

The police made a dramatic scene out of dusting the motor home for prints, but they didn't do much with the car next to ours. My suspicions may have been correct, after all, I thought.

A policeman told Walter that we would need to come down to the police station to be fingerprinted: that was the only way they could know which prints belonged to us, and which belonged to the perpetrators.

My usually unflappable husband was beginning to see how dangerous the situation had become. Since the Polish government might consider Radios personnel to be CIA operatives, the police request for our fingerprints held ominous possibilities. Who knew what they might try to "prove", if they had our prints?

At that point, it was hard to know whether this was just a local police action against us, or a larger KGB move. (Later, a friend told us that the local police had indeed bugged our motor home "under orders.") At any rate, we'd had friends disappear in Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe, never to be heard from again – and we weren't taking any chances.

So, Walter replied in Polish to the police request: "We have to be someplace else in a few minutes." It was about 7:00 a.m. by then. "We'll come by the station later." They looked a little flustered, as clearly they weren't used to someone not immediately following their orders, but they gave us extra time to get to the police station.

We had previously arranged to visit Lonik, an artist friend of ours, that day, in a nearby village. We called and asked if we could come earlier. Then we packed up our belongings, paid our bill, and left the motel. We had no intention of either returning to that motel or of going to the police station to be fingerprinted. Not surprisingly, I noticed a police-type blue van traveling behind us on the road, as we left the motel.