

DAN DELEON: I'm Dan DeLeon.

SUZANNE And I'm Suzanne Anderson, and you are watching *TV Montrose*.

ANDERSON:

DAN DELEON: Tonight, we are airing from the home of our producer Steve Baker, since later on we will be joined by one of our reporters and we needed the extra space to get the three of us on camera.

SUZANNE And tonight, also we're going to talk to *TV Montrose* reporter Jerry Miller about his December visit to Russia and

ANDERSON: hear from him about what gay life is like since the fall of communism.

DAN DELEON: To kick off our tour of post-communist Russia, let's go now to an introduction of this story entitled *Reds From Out of the Blue*.

SUZANNE And when we return, we'll be joined by Jerry, and we'll talk to him in more detail about gay life in Russia.

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: Russia. It has been called a mystery wrapped in an enigma. Even today, few people outside its borders truly understand what life is like for those inside. When a country presents such an unknowable public face to the world, one can't help but wonder how deeply they attempted to bury the faces they did not want the world to see.

For nearly a generation, the official Soviet party line was that lesbians and gays were not an issue since they claimed homosexuality did not exist within the Soviet Union. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the world began to get its first look behind the gray of the Iron Curtain. And the colors we found are amazing.

Hello, I'm Jerry Miller, and welcome to *Reds From Out of the Blue*, a *TV Montrose* production that looks at gay life from a Russian perspective. I'm standing in front of St Basil's Cathedral on Red Square, probably the most famous site in all of Russia. And about 100 yards to my left is Lenin's tomb, located directly in front of the outside wall of the Kremlin.

Now, some folks may be wondering about our title, *Reds From Out of the Blue*. Well, like most languages, Russian has a word, a slang term that means "gay." And just like the English word "gay," it has an original meaning. The word [SPEAKING RUSSIAN] in Russian originally meant "blue" and still does, but it also now carries the slang meaning of gay. What we're going to look at during the course of this show are different aspects of life and what it's like growing up and being gay in this culture, and what it meant in the past and what it might mean in the future.

The early days of Russia stretched back much further than US history. The Kremlin walls are actually those of the original fortified city of Moscow, founded 851 years ago. Throughout the last three centuries, Russia's culture was very similar to that in Western Europe. In fact, in the Tsar's courts, the official language was actually French. And many of the social conventions concerning alternative lifestyles were similar.

Few people lived openly as gays and lesbians, but polite society acknowledge them quietly as they found their way into the works of Russia's greatest authors, poets, and artists. However, when the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 came, it signaled an enormous cultural change. Once Lenin proclaimed formation of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922, the lives of gays and lesbians in the USSR became extraordinarily difficult. Under communism, there would be no tolerance for anyone living outside the norm.

20 years later, Soviet society had its opinion about lifestyles galvanized by its experience in World War II. The impacts of which on the Russian psyche are little known by non Russians. I'm here at what is considered the most solemn and important war memorial in Russia, it's their Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from World War II. In all, more than 22 million men between the ages of 18 and 35 died in Russia during World War II. And since there were only about 30 million of them between those ages at that time, you can see that it effectively wiped out an entire generation. The effect this had on the gay culture is that the social pressures applied to men and women who were not inclined to marrying and having children meant that they became even less acceptable to the already rigid Soviet culture.

In the 1994 Russian film, *Serpe e Molot*, or Hammer and Sickle, a Soviet era lesbian is forced to undergo an unwanted operation to change her gender from female to male. Once the operation is complete, the Soviet propaganda machine goes into full swing, presenting the formerly female character as the ultimate symbol of the communist male. The goal of this experiment is to prove that Soviet culture could not only make something useful out of homosexuals, but could even make them into ideal citizens. When the unwilling subject of this experiment and the physician in charge of it threatened to go public, Soviet leaders finally resort to violence to silence them.

SUZANNE ANDERSON: Joining us now is Jerry Miller. Jerry, that was really a startling, startling piece. I mean it's just so stark, and it really catches your attention.

JERRY MILLER: It is, and it's something that I'm really glad to be here to be able to bring to our viewers and to the rest of the gay community to let them know a little bit about that lifestyle over there. And I think one of the important things to think about with that film is whether it presents an actual event, or whether it presents fiction is it's really depicting the kind of mindset that existed for those folks, particularly post-world World War II, during the peak of the Soviet Cold War era.

SUZANNE ANDERSON: Well, it's scary, but I think that most of us expected something scary. It's just that when you see it, it's jolting.

JERRY MILLER: It is it's jarring to be confronted with that firsthand. And it's really interesting to see how it's changed. And that's something that always occurs to me every time I go back, and I've been there over the years many times, even over short periods of time, you see change. And I think that's something that we'll be able to see, because in our next segment, we're going to talk to a few of the folks that are there today, and find out a little bit about how their lives are.

We're going to talk to a Russian doctor, Dr. Andrei Ivanovich Polanski, who has returned to school to finish up psychiatric studies as a matter of fact. We're going to also talk to the deputy director of the botanical gardens of Moscow State University, a Russian gay businessman, and a gay couple.

SUZANNE Well, we have a lot to look forward to. Let's lead into a commercial, and then when we come back, we'll see clips
ANDERSON: from each of these incidents.

JERRY MILLER: Great.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

PERSONAL You are watching *TV Montrose*.

IMAGE SALON

STAFF:

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

MALE BANKER So what we got is--

1:

FEMALE Free checking at Bank United--

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Beyond the year 2000.

2:

MALE BANKER And we want to--

1:

FEMALE Make it safe!

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Give it some sizzle!

2:

MALE BANKER But don't forget the stake.

1:

FEMALE Right!

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Right!

2:

FEMALE How about unbelievably free checking?

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Free checkorama!

2:

FEMALE Hi, cha cha checking!

BANKER:

MALE BANKER OK, let's review.

1:

FEMALE No monthly service charges.

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Good.

1:

MALE BANKER No minimum balance.

2:

MALE BANKER Excellent.

1:

FEMALE Beyond the year 2000!

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Swell!

1:

MALE BANKER Monstrously free checking!

2:

FEMALE Checkzilla!

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Free checkasourus!

2:

MALE BANKER With toys?

1:

FEMALE Nah!

BANKER:

MALE BANKER Nah!

2:

MALE BANKER I've got it! Super free checking!

1:

FEMALE We could get that song!

BANKER:

ADVERTISER 1: Get free checking beyond the year 2000 at Bank United.

MALE BANKER Thank you, thank you! Woohoo!

1:

ADVERTISER 2: The University of Texas Houston has an ongoing treatment research clinic offering new medications and behavior therapy to help you quit substance abuse. Programs include medical evaluations, medications, and behavioral therapy free and completely confidential. Patients are also paid for their participation in the research.

You have everything to gain by losing your addictions at the UT Treatment Research Clinic.

JEFFREY BULES: Are you still using your parents' insurance agent? How good is your insurance if you're not comfortable talking to your agent? At the Schmerler Insurance Agency, we understand the special needs that special couples have. We insure the autos, homes, and businesses of people just like you all over the Houston area. We also handle health insurance, life insurance, renters insurance, and any other insurance needs you may have. I'm Jeffrey Bules.

ROB And I'm Rob Schmerler. Give us a call, and let us help with your insurance needs.

SCHMERLER:

JEFFREY BULES: The Schmerler Insurance Agency is here for you.

ADVERTISER 3: Lobo Bookshop and Cafe, Houston's only exclusively gay and lesbian bookstore. Serving the gay and lesbian community for 25 years, Lobo carries a full spectrum of fiction and non-fiction books, including the largest selection of used books in Houston. And also the largest selection of theatrical movies and other videos of interest to gays and lesbians. Lobo offers a wide selection of cards for any occasion, and plenty of merchandise to select gifts for others or yourself.

And there's nothing better than a cup of fresh brewed coffee at the Lobo Cafe. Select from 40 flavors and a menu of specialty coffees. The Lobo Cafe also carries fresh made sandwiches and a wide assortment of desserts including cheesecakes and cookies. For videos, magazines, and merchandise exclusively of interest to the gay and lesbian community, there is no other place like Lobo Bookshop and Cafe.

WEDDING You are watching *TV Montrose*.

PARTY:

DAN DELEON: Welcome back, we're here at Steve, our producer's home, and talking further with Jerry Miller and progressing with this wonderful coverage of his trip to Moscow. So Jerry, what do we have coming up next?

JERRY MILLER: What we're going to do is take a chance to meet some of the Russians that are gay and living in Moscow today. What I did was on this trip take a small handheld camera with me. Unfortunately couldn't travel with a full *TV Montrose* camera crew, and we set it up and took an opportunity to talk with each of them.

The first person up is Dr. Andrei Ivanovich Polanski. He's a physician who has returned to school and is finishing up his last year in psychiatric studies. I started out by asking him what life was like for a gay person during the era of the Soviet Union.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

During the time of the Soviet Union it was very difficult. A lot of problems for gay people.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

That was especially difficult for people who were gay, who were living in the provincial cities, smaller towns to ever get a chance to meet other gay people. Tell us a little bit about when you came to Moscow, and what brought you here.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

He said actually there were two reasons. One was to continue with his studies. And he said, perhaps the other reason may have been for being able to have a more open gay life.

Andrei is probably one of the most interesting people you'd like to meet He's finished medical school before coming to Moscow, and at that point, entered the military. And his job there was to parachute into battle areas as a field physician, and he was eventually stationed in Germany, and was even there for the fall of the Berlin Wall. So when he tells me he wishes his life were more interesting, I have to wonder how much more interesting it could get.

SUZANNE So did they have gays in the military there? Did they know, or do you have to hide? I guess they--

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: Absolutely you have to hide. Absolutely. Yeah, it is not even a don't ask, don't tell. It's don't even think about it over there. And that's different though for some folks nowadays. As a matter of fact, someone that we're going to meet next in an interview is a person who is the deputy director of the Moscow University Botanical Garden.

It's one of the most interesting places in the city to visit. It's one of the world's oldest botanical gardens, they even have trees that were planted by Nicholas I that are still alive. It's really, really an interesting place.

SUZANNE Well, the beauty that we've seen so far kind of catches me, the blue skies and all. Because I think of Russia, I

ANDERSON: think of the country being rather dreary, and the people being rather dreary. And one of the things that's kind of coming out of this for me is that's not necessarily so.

JERRY MILLER: Yes, that's absolutely right. Although the weather can get kind of gray and kind of cold, in all honesty, the people are very warm hearted. And Artum, by the way, also speaks beautiful English, and we'll have an opportunity to learn that about him when we talk to him.

SUZANNE Let's see what he's got to say.

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: You had mentioned that the staff of the garden is now made up of some newer folks, as you phrased it, bringing in some fresh blood, some younger people in the environment here in the office. Can you tell me a little bit about what this environment is like as a workplace? Is there any difficulty in being out in this workplace?

ATRUM No, there are no difficulties, because I'm not very open. Some people know, some people don't. And I actually,
PARSHIN: I'm not the only person in the garden who's gay. Our director is gay as well, and he's my good friend. We know each other for 15 years.

JERRY MILLER: Oh, that's great.

ATRUM And so there are no problems. The environment is quite friendly.

PARSHIN:

JERRY MILLER: Is it actually part of the university, are you employed by the university?

ATRUM Yes, we are the employees of the university. We are state employees. The garden is a part of biological
PARSHIN: department of the University.

JERRY MILLER: Artum learned his English from British nationals, and so he probably speaks it better than most of us do.

DAN DELEON: So if he had been taught from someone from the South, he'd have a definite drawl or a twang or--

JERRY MILLER: I'm not sure. Maybe Suzanne could teach him a few--

SUZANNE I bet your pardon. I have no accent. What's coming up next?

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: Well, we've already spoken to somebody who is in school, we've spoken to somebody who works for the state. Now we're going to talk to a gay Russian businessman. His name is Andrei Basonov, he owns a salon called the Image Gallery Basonov.

DAN DELEON: Oh, you got his staff to say "you you're watching *TV Montrose*."

JERRY MILLER: Exactly, yeah.

SUZANNE Yeah, yeah.

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: I think some of the folks at home may remember some of the folks who work for him. And one of the things, of course, I was interested in was to ask him whether that was difficult opening the first all gay Russian business.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

ANDREI Yes, in Russia, these things are always a problem, big problems. What is important is how we balance the
BASONOV situations in Russia. Although we have difficulties, they are problems that can be solved.

THROUGH

INTERPRETER:

Now things are not so bad that the salon is established. Now everything is normal.

JERRY MILLER: I also asked Mr. Basonov how long salon had been open. He said three years. He went on to say that at the moment, life for him is good, and that he felt that life in Russia was probably similar to gay life in America.

SUZANNE You know, Jerry, he talks about the similarities, and you can really see a lot of similarities. And it's a real strong
ANDERSON: statement for the gay gene.

JERRY MILLER: You know, I think you're exactly right. For any of us who've seen the "you're watching *TV Montrose*" from his staff, I have to say, without having a lot of culture interaction, there has to be a pretty strong argument for a genetic cause. And some of the other similarities that I noticed also are in the way relationships work over there.

SUZANNE Is their social life similar, or do they meet in private? Do they have a Rich's over there?

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: Well, as a matter of fact, up until a few years ago, it was all done privately. People kind of knew other people, and you met for private parties in their homes. But nowadays, there are quite a few nightclubs, quite a few bars, a number of them with very, very strong Western influence as a matter of fact. Playing the same music, you see pretty much the same styles, right down to the dress and the haircut.

SUZANNE Well, the government has to be allowing that. I mean, they know they exist.

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: As a matter of fact, interestingly enough, this is a great, great retribution maybe. One of the biggest gay clubs there is called club Chance, and it is located in the former party headquarters of the young communists.

SUZANNE Oh, right on. That's terrific.

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: One of the things we spoke about earlier were similarities, and the similarities between behavior and relationships. And something that I found interesting was the way couples interact. And that leads us into our next interview, which is with a gay couple, Rostem and Kolya. I started out by asking them how long their relationship has been going on.

How long have you been together?

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

At the beginning-- In February, it will be three years that they've been together. And is that common in Russia?

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

Yes, Kolya says that is fairly common. They have folks that they know have been together as many as 25 years. I wanted to ask how the families react to this kind of situation.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

We have different situations, Kolya and I. I come from a very old and conservative large family.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

Where on the other hand, in Kolya's situation, his mother is aware. His mother knows.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

Needless to say, in my family, there's no one who knows. But however, my mother knows. In principle, I really don't know how she feels. But on the other hand, I do know that she wishes that I had a standard family. So that there would be children and that sort of thing.

But she still doesn't understand, although she knows the situation why that can't happen anyway.

DAN DELEON: What a great couple, and the mother who just wanted them to have kids anyway, regardless. It seems like some of the same issues that gay and lesbian couples here in America are going through.

JERRY MILLER: As a matter of fact, it's true. And what's interesting is that's really a byproduct of their history. We talked earlier about the fact that they lost so many of their male population as a result of World War II, it was expected that women and men were going to marry and have children. And so as a result, many of the lesbians and gays developed a dual life. They would marry, they would have children, and then outside of that relationship, they would have their love relationship.

SUZANNE ANDERSON: Those numbers were mind boggling they lost 22 million men out of a population of 30 million?

JERRY MILLER: About 30 million in that age bracket, so that really effectively wiped out that whole generation.

SUZANNE ANDERSON: That's amazing.

DAN DELEON: Fascinating stuff. It is now time for a commercial break. But when we come back, gay and lesbians in Moscow in the future.

MARIA TODD: Hi, I'm Maria Todd from 104 KRBE, and you're watching *TV Montrose*. Mwah!

ADVERTISER 4: Celebrating 15 years, it's Houston's premiere alternative dance club. Rich's has a hottest music hits, the largest dance floor, four huge bars, and the wildest theme parties. Rich's is the place to be for fun and action. The only New York style dance club for the gay and lesbian scene.

Rich's is where the real world ends and your imagination begins. Be a part of the fun at Rich's this week. Rich's, where you can always be yourself.

SUZANNE ANDERSON: Don't even think about buying or selling a home without hiring a professional. A home is the biggest financial investment that you will ever make, and I am always amazed at how casually people select a realtor. They'll call the name of a sign, or take the name of a friend of a friend. To be a good realtor, you have to be a good listener, and I listen to my clients and I customize my services to fit your needs. We listen, present creative solutions, and help you make decisions in buying or selling a home.

ADVERTISER 5: The Texas Triangle is a free weekly newspaper reaching over 60,000 readers every week. Available every Thursday throughout Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas, and 20 other Texas cities, The Triangle offers the best in news, features, and entertainment. A six time award winner, it's the only gay newspaper to receive an outstanding journalism award from the National Gay and Lesbian Journalists Association.

The Houston press writes, "for gay and lesbian news, by far the best is the Texas Triangle." So pick up the triangle every week. Quality makes a difference.

ADVERTISER 6: Baba Yaga, a Montrose tradition. Two lush patios and a spectacular waterfall make dining at Baba Yaga peaceful experience. The only thing better than the atmosphere is the food. With a wide variety of fine entrees, there's something for everyone's taste, including a veggie menu.

The Jasmine room is perfect for business or social meetings. Also visit the wild Earth herb shop next door. Excellent food, superb staff, tranquil surroundings, and moderate prices make Baba Yaga the complete dining experience.

CROWD: You are watching *TV Montrose!*

SUZANNE Jerry, we've talked a little bit about the past, we've talked about what the gays are going are dealing with now.

ANDERSON: What do you see is the future for the gay and lesbian community?

JERRY MILLER: Well, interestingly enough, what is kind of unusual is the fact that these folks have struggled from that past to gain some acceptance now. And what really will concern them are the same things concerning everyone, which are the economic and political issues that that country is dealing with right now.

DAN DELEON: How about some of the Western influence. Is it just now starting to penetrate their particular lifestyles?

JERRY MILLER: Well, it's been really interesting. And something that I've noticed over the years that I've been traveling there. Even in the short span of maybe four or five years, you see so much change and such strong influence from the West. Nowadays in Moscow proper, you see billboards in English for Western products, US goods. And some may view that as a positive, some of you that is a negative, and personally, I think I've witnessed some negative influence from the West.

Prior to a lot of the Russians traveling outside the former Soviet Union and a lot of the Westerners traveling in, the individuals in the gay culture really developed as individuals. They each had a very distinct personality because being gay was a secondary thing. And what I've witnessed in recent years is a real embracing by the Russian gays of Western gay culture.

SUZANNE Now you see that more in the men's community, the gay men's community, I think than the lesbian community.

ANDERSON: And we haven't really done anything, we haven't interviewed or talked to any lesbians. Where do you-- I mean, how do you see the lesbians? How are they the same? How are they different?

And are they actually being-- I mean, well, how would they be influenced by the West? What would be the changes that--

JERRY MILLER: They actually have an extremely well-organized lesbian culture within Moscow, in any event. They have a lesbian arts league there, very active. Now interestingly enough, they also tend to be even more closed than what you might see here. There's not a lot of interaction between the lesbian community and the gay male community there, and that may really be stemming from the fact that, previously, everyone had to be a bit more private and so you didn't tend to interact so much.

One of the things that we wanted to mention was how we think things will occur in the future for all of these individuals. And each one of them that we interviewed had their own personal concerns. For example, Dr. Polanski, who's finishing up his term in psychiatric studies is really just hoping that the economy will stay together so that he can work in the healthcare field when he finishes. But again, the economics, even if he's able to, the average salary for a doctor working in Russia today is only between \$100 and \$200 a month.

SUZANNE Are they salaried by the government?

ANDERSON:

JERRY MILLER: It depends on what type of clinic they work in, but unfortunately, the government is stepping away more and more from providing healthcare. It's all becoming more provided privately. The same type of issue economics for Artum, the deputy director at the Botanical Gardens. He's worked so hard to preserve the specimens that he has in the glass houses, some of which go back over 200 years. And now, of course, it's winter in Moscow, and the big concern is whether or not the university can continue to pay the heating bill to keep all of these specimens alive. And so if they're not able to do so, the work of a couple of centuries could actually be lost.

SUZANNE
ANDERSON: And so what'd the hairdresser tell you he was concerned about?

JERRY MILLER: Well, that's really interesting because aside from the economics, he has political concerns. He addressed early on about the fact that it was difficult to get an all gay business started in Russia. And since there's now political upheaval potentially if Yeltsin's administration should fall, and some of the ultranationalists come in and bring communists back, his concern is that not only could he suffer economically, because obviously people couldn't really afford the luxury of going to a style salon as well, he might face political persecution because he has 100% gay male business, which is openly operated.

DAN DELEON: Jerry, I'm interested to know what the future holds for the couple there in Moscow.

JERRY MILLER: Rostem, and Kolya. Again, their concerns are both economic and political. Because of the economic situation, Kolya has not been able to work since last September, and Rostem, who also works in radio advertising, is seeing his business dry up because businesses are pulling out of Russia. And their situation is getting to the point they're actually considering leaving Russia.

SUZANNE
ANDERSON: Be interesting to see what does happen in the future. And let's see what's going on in Houston, in our future. The community calendar.

JACK FALINSKI: Hi, this is Jack Falinski.

JOAN DEVLIN: And I'm Joan Devlin.

JACK FALINSKI: And we do Lesbian and Gay Voices every Friday evening at 8:00 PM on KPFT, 90.1 FM.

JOAN DEVLIN: And now you're about to see the community calendar.

DAN DELEON: Suzanne, are you feeling any jet lag from our visit to Russia?

SUZANNE
ANDERSON: Oh please, this little ol' lady gets jet lag just going to Dallas on an airplane.

DAN DELEON: To end tonight's show, we want to encourage you, our viewers, to mention to our advertisers that you have seen their support on *TV Montrose* next time you visit them.

SUZANNE
ANDERSON: It's very important that our advertisers supporters know that their support of us is seen by you.

DAN DELEON: And remember to ask for those free checks when you open a personal account at the new Bank United at Richmond and Montrose.

SUZANNE Just tell them that you saw the commercial on *TV Montrose*.

ANDERSON:

DAN DELEON: In the coming weeks, expect to see more stories about what is going on in the Montrose area.

SUZANNE And if you have a story or an idea or an event that you think that *TV Montrose* should do a story about, then call

ANDERSON: us or send us an email.

DAN DELEON: Or if you want just say, hi, and tell us appreciate a show like *TV Montrose*.

SUZANNE Until next week, I'm Suzanne Anderson.

ANDERSON:

DAN DELEON: And I'm Dan DeLeon. Good night.