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Kirsten Koza's *Lost In Moscow* is ethnographical. It depicts the culture of an eleven-year-old girl and, through her lens, it naively depicts Russian communist culture in 1977. Koza presents a uniquely vivid, personal memoir of her travels to summer camp in Russia as an adolescent. A small town girl from Cheltenham, Ontario, Kirsten reluctantly explores Russian culture with little acceptance or approval, however, it is clear that this experience has changed her life.

For the reader, Koza's book is a perfect venue to step back in time and reflect on an abandoned culture and political era. Her use of language invites the reader to come along with her on her travels from the moment that her parents drop her off at the airport and, through her eyes, we experience the U.S.S.R. with an innocent, childish spin. Her descriptions do not leave the reader wondering about the finer details and differences between former Canadian and Russian cultures. From sharing a single glass at the pop machine to low-riding toilets with stirrups, Koza openly shares her most intimate experiences with people and places in the former Soviet Union.

Kirsten is hesitant to accept the differences of others and, throughout the book, there is an impending fear of "being caught" by the Red Army. Nevertheless, Kirsten tests the limits and dives into a world of confrontations and challenges where perseverance is at the heart of a summer experience to be remembered, preserved and shared.

Tough Drum: Briefly describe the book.

Kirsten Koza: When I was eleven-years-old my parents sent me to summer camp in the USSR, for the entire summer, no phoning home. I wasn't forbidden to phone home but in 1977 one couldn't just pick up a phone from behind the Iron Curtain and call the West. My parents weren't communists and I had no family in Russia. My folks were just young and thought four hundred dollars for a whole summer sounded like a good deal. It was my rebellious English grandma who was the "Red". She was the one who signed me up and delivered the news to my parents that I'd been selected by the Soviet government along with a small group of Canadian children from across Canada to make this journey. And we did. The book is about our exploits that summer in the USSR...being chased by the Red Army until being entirely lost in Moscow and not even knowing the name of the hotel, parachuting at camp without permission or lessons or equipment that fit, cosmonaut training, vodka and being radiated for tonsillitis. It's told through my wild-child eyes but it's not a book for children due to certain subject matter (sex) and content (swearing). Or in other words...the book is about what real kids do, but is not what real kids are allowed to read. It's a true story but reads like fiction.

TD: What path have you taken in becoming a writer?

KK: Being a writer was the first thing I ever wanted to be. But during my public school years I was told that this was truly an impossible dream and I abandoned the whole crazy notion. Instead I went into theatre...Bizarrely, no one discouraged me this time. I studied acting at Dalhousie University and later went on to do my post grad in theatre in London England at East 15. Theatre training and working for years in that profession gave me fabulous tools for writing. How did I end up on the actual path to writing a book though, a book, which has nothing to do with the theatre...well it was an accident. It took

a sequence of events; my car being stolen from a service bay during an oil change, my passport and papers were in the glove box, I lost a job overseas, my parents decided to move to France and my mom delivered a big box of my childhood to me. Inside the box was my diary and scrapbook full of photos from my summer in the USSR. I'm not even sure why I sat down at the computer and started writing. But at page 75, not even out of Moscow and at the summer camp on the Black Sea, I realized I had a book.

TD: How did you revive the memories of this trip in order to write this story?

KK: My mother was "the" enforcer of record keeping. So I kept a daily diary, never missing a date that summer. I had my little camera that we got when we subscribed to Time and when I got home I made my scrapbook gluing in every photo, chocolate bar wrapper and pop label that I'd stashed away and I captioned each. But beyond the material that had been stowed away all those years in my parents' house—every day was a huge deal in the USSR. It was an entire summer of days that were equivalent to one's most vivid childhood moment. Of course, I'm also one of those horrible people that can quote something someone said ten years ago, word for word.

TD: What aspects of Russian culture stand out in your mind the most today?

KK: The toilets. No, well, are toilets a part of a culture? They must be. And when you lined up in a public washroom in Moscow, you looked into the eyes of the person going to the toilet. They were the toiletless-toilets, where you stood on two foot-pads and the doors only covered the person's body not their face. If you were using the facility you looked into the eyes of the people in line. That's a different culture that does that. It's a different society. A different perception of privacy and a different perception of what makes something private. You gazed into the eyes of someone having a bowel movement but chewing gum was illegal.

TD: How long did you work at this book?

KK: It took a year to write. And another half-year to fine-tune it at the same time as wondering what to do next...how was I to find a publisher? I bought a couple "how-to" books on the subject of finding a publisher and followed their advice. But then...I was reading *Kabloona* in the *Yellow Kayak*, a non-fiction tale about a Grandma who paddles across the entire artic. I kept looking at the cover and thinking, "Wow, what a great cover". Then one night I sat up in bed as the light bulb finally went off—"Send your book to Turnstone Press because you love what they've done with *Kabloona*". I went online and checked them out, then followed their submission guidelines to the tee. I didn't want a page too many or a font too small blowing this for me.

TD: How is your book tour going?

KK: It's exhausting. My publishing house has been brilliantly supportive. They've flown me to the East Coast; next they're sending me West. They've held the launches at the very best bookstores in our country. I've been talking at schools and Universities. It never ends you know. Just because it has been published and it is in the stores and all over the Internet internationally—the author doesn't just get to sit back. I've almost finished my second book and I mean almost but this last month of readings and signings has definitely slowed the progress down. I'm not worried though. It's non-fiction humorous adventure travel again. I don't have the difficult task of a fiction writer—I know

where my story has to go, because it's true. And I know that on June 27 at 2:00 PM I'm going to be standing there at Canada's BookExpo in the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, at the Turnstone booth, feeling like I did the first day I sent out my manuscript.