

FORGET WEENIE ROASTS

An 11-year-old camps out in *Moscow*



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by **Polly Washburn**

How many Canadians can say they once won a footrace with Russian soldiers at the age of 11? Kirsten Koza can.

Koza was one of several Canadians who participated in a program run by the Canada-USSR Association to send young people to the former Soviet Union for summer camp. In *Lost in Moscow: A Brat in the U.S.S.R.*, Koza details many scrapes and adventures she and her friends got into, including a chase with soldiers through Red Square, stumbling into a secret Communist Party meeting, and going skydiving without knowing for sure that the parachute would work.

Koza credits a good memory with being able to piece together the stories for the book.

"I remember what people said five years ago," she says. "And they hate me for it."

A diary and a scrapbook she kept of the trip aided her memories. "My mom was the scrapbook Nazi. At the time I complained, but I'm so glad that she did it now," says Koza.

"I found that by sitting down and going through it day by day, so many things just clicked. We don't normally go into our lives like that, but I think if we all took a photograph a day, we could remember our whole lives."

An irony is that *Lost in Moscow* is actually more accurate than the diary. Young Koza was well aware that her parents were going to read her words and she censored herself accordingly. When re-reading it, she says, she was able to distinguish between her cover-ups and what really happened.

"It's amazing how you remember the lies better than the truths," she says.

Some secrets remained hidden until Koza was ready to publish. "I let my

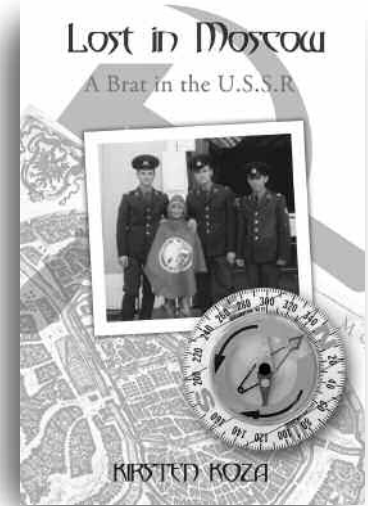
parents read it before I sent it off to publishers, and let's just say they were enlightened. I said, 'You can't spank me now!'"

Koza, who has not yet returned to the former Soviet Republics, says the main impact the trip had on her life is that she can't stop travelling. "It's constant for me; I just have to explore—not just travelling on a cruise, but dropping myself somewhere and being there," she says.

Her propensity to get in trouble, well documented in the book, has also lingered. "I don't try to, but I always seem to end up in trouble or imagined trouble. I'm always running and hiding. I always think I'm in trouble, so I'm always ready," she says.

Though the book is written from the perspective of a precocious 11-year-old, it is intended for adults.

"I think anyone who grew up in the '70s would enjoy it. They would recognize all the references," says Koza.



Was it difficult for Koza to go back to her youth and write as though she were 11?

"It was easy," she says. "I get shocked when I look in the mirror and find I'm in my thirties." ❖

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