

Vladivostok Memories

by Nicholas A. Lotito

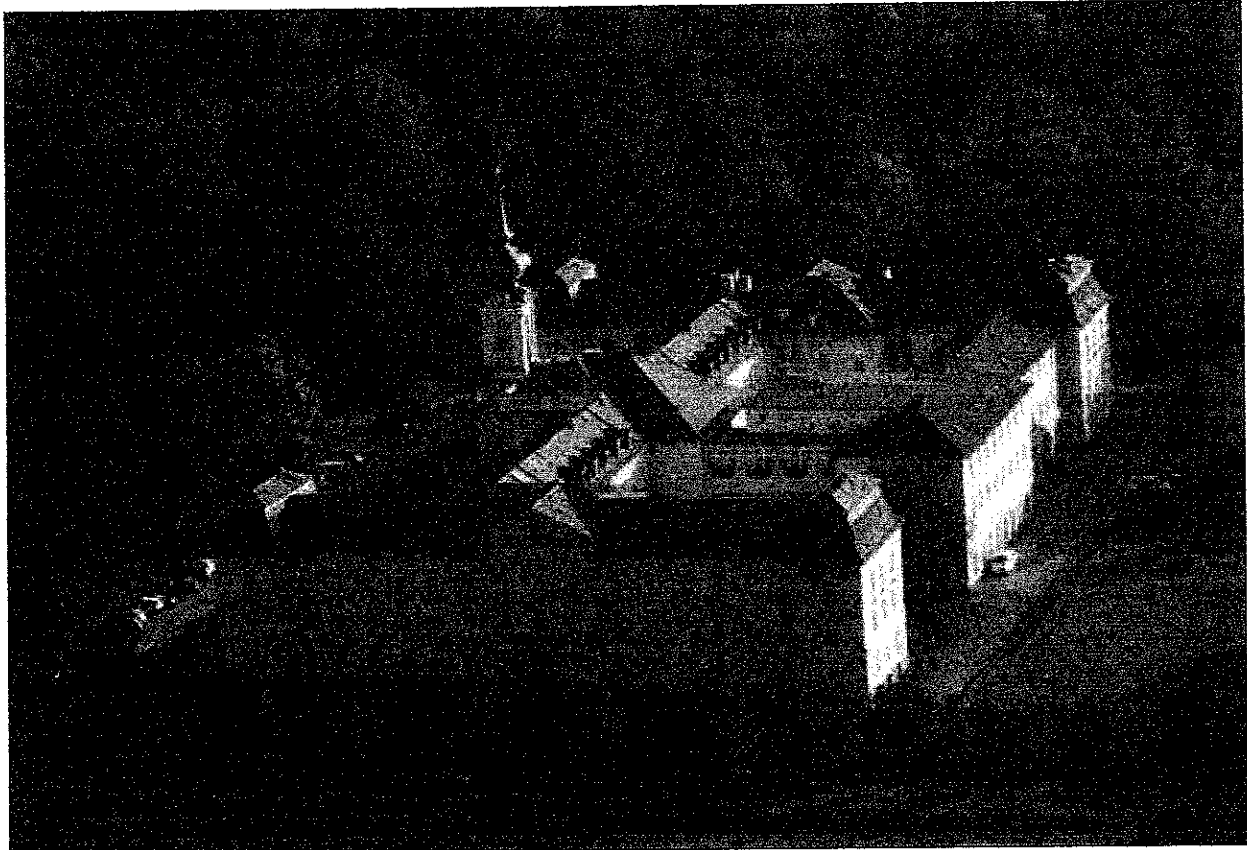
Oliver Wendell Holmes is credited with saying, "Old age is fifteen years older than I am." This is a philosophy I have harbored for quite sometime; however, I was not aware that someone so notable had previously articulated it. Despite this optimistic, and at some point inaccurate assessment, I did

something last fall which is worth sharing with fellow youthful, albeit chronologically impaired lawyers. I taught a course in criminal law and procedure at Vladivostok State University Law School in Vladivostok, Russia, an exotic city on the southeast coast of Russia, a mere 6,600 miles and a 16-hour time difference from Atlanta.



Nicholas Lotito posing with some of his very enthusiastic second-year students

While practicing criminal law for the past 30 plus years, mostly in private practice, I was somewhat envious of various federal prosecutors who traveled to the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and other places for months at a time, purportedly to assist with the creation of legal systems or teach in those countries. I lamented that those assignments were not available while I was a government prosecutor. Also, as my son, Alex, now 16, got older, I considered several opportunities to combine legal experience and travel. I thought about one of the numerous People to People invitations I received to be a delegate with a group going to China, Russia or elsewhere;



The Schloss Leopoldsdorf Palace, where lawyer-teachers "roughed it" during orientation week in Salzburg, Austria

applying to prosecute or defend war criminals at the Hague, or even becoming involved in the efforts to obtain justice out of the morass in Rwanda. In each case, I determined that the time was not right, the commitment too long or that there was some other reason not to embark on one of those ventures.

A couple of years ago I saw an ad from the Center for International Legal Studies, offering lawyers with 25 years experience the opportunity to teach in their Senior Lawyers Program. Somewhat impulsively, I applied. Several months later I was notified to attend an interview in Chicago, and I did so. Eventually, I was selected for the program and requested assignments in Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic or Croatia. I was assigned to Russia, and only after committing to teach was I notified that I would travel to Vladivostok. It was a venue I had not anticipated. I had a choice of a spring or fall assignment, and after

learning that September and October are two of the best months in Vladivostok, I selected the fall of 2007. Teaching assignments are for a minimum of two weeks and can be as long as the institution will have you. One Minnesota lawyer taught in Mongolia for six months. A two- to three- week assignment is fairly typical, and I taught for the last half of October. Teaching is pro bono, although the host institution provides lodging.

A fringe benefit of a Center for International Legal Studies (CILS) teaching assignment is a week-long orientation in Salzburg, Austria, where CILS is based. It operates out of the Schloss Leopoldsdorf, a palace that was once owned by Max Reinhardt and used in filming the *Sound of Music*. The week in Salzburg was very enjoyable. There were presentations each day from professors at various host universities, and from attorneys who work with the European Union and in

Russia. Kent Harbison, the lawyer who exiled himself to Mongolia, also shared his experiences with the group. There were about 35 lawyers at my session, and it was informative and a pleasure to spend time in Salzburg. Another Atlanta lawyer, Allen Greenberg, who practices copyright law, was in the group and is teaching this spring in Kaliningrad, Russia. Augusta attorney Stanley Jackson attended and then taught at the University of Maribor in Slovenia.

The trip from Salzburg to Vladivostok is a journey unto itself. A train to Vienna, a flight to Moscow and another nine-hour flight covering over 4,000 miles from Moscow to Vladivostok got me there in a fairly bleary-eyed condition on a Sunday morning. Happily, I was met by a Russian student who drove me to the university and helped me get settled in my dorm quarters for my stay in Vladivostok.

Vladivostok has a reported population of about 700,000, with a mixture of many Russians and a growing number of Asians. The topography is somewhat reminiscent of San Francisco with steep hills and a waterfront area. There are islands visible from the coast and an active downtown with restaurants, hotels and various businesses. Ornate Russian orthodox churches are ubiquitous. While in Salzburg, a lawyer from Colorado had put me in touch with a business colleague familiar with Vladivostok. He in turn sent me an e-mail describing Vladivostok as "one of the world's most exotic cities." This preview greatly improved my assessment of my assignment and proved to be extremely accurate. There were many World War II monuments, including a lengthy wall with engraved names, causing me to wonder if it had inspired our Vietnam Memorial. There is also much new construction as Vladivostok is expanding rapidly. It is hosting an Asia Pacific summit conference in 2012, and the city is being transformed to accommodate it, with Putin pledging \$4 billion for growth in the region.

In advance of my trip, I prepared about 150 pages of written presentations on six of the 10 or 11 topics I was asked to cover. I had notes and research materials for the other topics and produced outlines for these other lectures while I was in Vladivostok. I taught about 12 classes ranging from one and a half to three hours on our Constitution and Bill of Rights, an overview of our criminal justice system, a survey of federal crimes, the sentencing process, juvenile proceedings, the death penalty, terrorism, organized crime and corruption, the use of precedents, and assassinations (an unusual topic I was asked to cover). Class size ranged from 20 to 100 students, and I taught at least two classes to each of the five years of law school students and to a class in international relations. The students were

extremely interested in U.S. law and asked good questions. They are generally used to being lectured to, but I tried to get them to participate as much as possible, and they seemed to enjoy that.

When at the law school, I enjoyed minor celebrity status. Students generally stood out of respect prior to a lecture and often applauded at the end of a lecture. This may simply have been a showing of approval that the class had come to a conclusion. Four or five times students wanted to have pictures taken with me, and I have a number of photos that were e-mailed to me. Of course, I was used to this type of reaction from various jurors I have addressed. (I wish.)

somewhat lacking in creature comforts taken for granted here. For example, four or five of the days I did not have hot water and had to heat water in order to bathe. Perhaps as a vestige of communism, Vladivostok has central heating. When I heard this I thought nothing of it since central heating is common elsewhere. However, in Vladivostok, that means everyone is on the same heating system, and that system was not turned on for the first half of my stay. While October was supposed to be a mild month, it snowed at the end of my first week. This made for some pretty scenery, but it was much colder than I had anticipated



Vladivostok after an unexpected October snow

In smaller groups, I had some interesting conversations with students, sharing some personal experiences. I told them of growing up in south Florida, close to Cuba, and sitting around a television with my family as Russian ships approached Cuba. For me, it was a frightening experience at age 13. I explained that it meant a great deal for me to be teaching in Russia after having experienced the earlier tension between our countries. A number of students said they looked forward to traveling to the United States. I thought the students were much like students here.

The overall experience in Vladivostok and in the dorm was

Without heat, I suggested the experience may have amounted to cool and unusual punishment. Oddly, I had an 11 p.m. curfew. I was informed that if I returned after 11 p.m., I would not be allowed in, and if I had someone in my room after 11 p.m., they would not be allowed out.

The businessman who e-mailed me also put me in touch with Eugenia Klokova, an English teacher from Vladivostok who was a wonderful hostess. She frequently had friends of hers pick me up and show me around the city. Eugenia also introduced me to members of the regional bar association and a local rotary group. There were a couple of

Americans living in my dorm who were teaching in Vladivostok for varying periods of time, and I also enjoyed meeting them and comparing notes over dinner.

As my time in Vladivostok drew to a close, I left with some sadness. I really enjoyed getting to know some of the students and also found that I took to the process of teaching more than I had expected. It is a lot of work to prepare to teach something for the first time, but I thoroughly immersed myself into the experience. A really good thing about CILS is that once you have been selected to teach in their Senior Lawyers Program, you can re-enlist at some future time. While I think I will wait a couple of years before seeking another assignment, I look forward to doing this again, perhaps in another location.

Because I was in a part of the world I was unsure I would revisit, I decided to go to see another country before returning. I chose Thailand because a friend of my brother's had been living there for about six months, and he had offered to show me around. That was another good experience and involved a week of R&R after teaching in Vladivostok. I commend this opportunity to anyone interested in a challenge, a new adventure and an opportunity to share our values with others who are receptive to hearing about them. ●



Nicholas A. Lotito is a partner at Davis, Zipperman, Kirschenbaum and Lotito. He is a past president of the

Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and former federal prosecutor with the Antitrust Division of the Justice Department. He practices criminal defense law, representing clients in federal and state matters. He has been repeatedly named a "Super Lawyer" in the area of white collar criminal defense.