

CITIZEN DIPLOMATS

PATHFINDERS IN SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS—
AND HOW YOU CAN JOIN THEM



GALE WARNER and MICHAEL SHUMAN

Foreword by Carl Sagan



CHAPTER NINE

THE INNOCENT ABROAD:

SAMANTHA SMITH

Samantha Smith caught cynics unawares. She could not have been more like the traditional diplomats she unintentionally provoked. She made postures. She struck no negotiating positions. She did not try to reassure disparate constituencies of her middle course. She did not let the fact that she was not an expert keep her from speaking out. She refused to accept that "difficult" meant impossible. She did not believe we could afford cynicism. She set the world in a tizzy.

When she was killed in a plane crash on August 25, 1985, millions of people all over the world grieved as if for their own child. For, in a way, she was a child of the world—a symbol of childhood itself, a guardian of our dreams and hopes for children everywhere. Now she will be a child forever. Her voice will remain high and pure, her vision unobscured by shades of gray, by comprehensive but disempowering "buts" and "on the other hands." Her dreams are intact, but it is now up to the rest of us to carry them out. What she did for the world will never be measurable, but that she did something is incontrovertible.

The heads of the two most powerful nations on earth sent condolences to her mother, Jane. "Everyone in the Soviet Union who has known Samantha Smith will remember forever the image of the American girl who, like millions of Soviet young men and women, dreamt about peace, and about friendship between the peoples of the United States and the Soviet Union," said Mikhail Gorbachev in a telegram. President Reagan, who never publicly acknowledged Samantha while she was alive, wrote: "Perhaps you can take some measure of comfort in the knowledge that millions of Americans, indeed millions of people, share the burdens of your grief. They also will cherish and remember Samantha, her smile, her idealism and unaffected sweetness of spirit."

Samantha and her father, Arthur, were on their way back from a two-

week filming session in England for a television series featuring Samantha called *Lime Street*. The Beechcraft 99 skimmed the tops of trees, crashed, and burst into flames on its approach to the Lewiston-Auburn airport, killing everyone aboard. Three days later, more than a thousand people gathered for a memorial service in Augusta, Maine. Though Augusta is an off-limits area for Soviet officials, the State Department hastily granted an exception to Vladimir Kulagin, the first secretary for cultural affairs of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC, and a personal friend of the Smiths. After reading Gorbachev's telegram, Kulagin put aside his notes and told the crowd in English, "You should know that millions of mothers and fathers and kids back in Russia share this tragic loss. The best thing would be if we continued what they started with good will, friendship and love. Samantha shone like a brilliant beam of sunshine at a time when relations between our two countries were clouded."

US Senators Mitchell and Cohen of Maine have introduced a bill that would establish and fund a two-million-dollar "Samantha Smith Memorial Exchange Program" to promote youth exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is helping keep her memory alive by issuing a special commemorative stamp in her honor and announcing that a newly discovered Siberian diamond of rare beauty will be named after her. A two-way television space bridge between children in Minneapolis and Moscow in December 1985, organized by the Peace Child Foundation, was dedicated to Samantha's memory.

And Jane Smith is making a determined and gutsy commitment to carry on her daughter's and husband's work. She has organized the Samantha Smith Foundation to promote Soviet-American youth exchanges. In 1986 the Foundation cosponsored, with Ted Turner's Goodwill Games project, an international youth art competition for Soviet and American children and a journey to the Soviet Union for twenty of Samantha's eighth-grade classmates from Manchester, Maine.

I interviewed Samantha and her parents in their home in April 1985, and wrote the following chapter in May 1985. Not wanting to hide Samantha behind the screen of an obituary, I have left the chapter as it was before she died. Some of it is painful, now, to read. But perhaps that pain will help awaken us to the preciousness of life, which Samantha so well understood, and inspire us to work for her dreams.

—G. W.

On a banner behind the makeshift stage, in handpainted, childish askew letters, is a quote from Mahatma Gandhi: "If we are to reach re

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peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the CHILDREN." About two hundred parents and children are sitting in a dormitory lounge at the University of Southern Maine in Gorham, Maine, whispering to each other about the television cameramen maneuvering in the background. Soon Samantha Smith bounds to the microphone like a young cat released from a cage.

"I thought I'd read a few selections from my book, if you guys don't mind," she begins, beaming a winsome smile at the audience and tossing her head to one side. "Actually, the whole thing started when I asked my mother if there was going to be a war. There was always something on television about missiles and nuclear bombs. Once I watched a science show on public television and the scientists said that a nuclear war would wreck the earth and destroy our atmosphere. Nobody could win a nuclear war. I remember that I woke up one morning and wondered if this was going to be the last day of the earth."

Samantha Smith is now nearly thirteen years old. Under her fashionable blue-and-white checked blouse and skirt are incipient signs of puberty. The girl who so impressed hard-bitten reporters as a "gangly-legged bundle of energy" and charmed them with her penchant for softball is growing up. Her straight brunette hair, once held back in a hair band, has now been clipped into a stylish page-boy. Her lips are tinged with lipstick and mascara highlights her wide blue eyes. Still, despite the attention, despite the instant fame, despite the book, despite Hollywood, Samantha has held on to her charming lack of professionalism. When she occasionally flubs a word she shakes her head and glances up at the audience with a self-deprecating grin. She reads quickly and decisively. She appears to have a good deal to say.

"I asked my mother who would start a war and why. She showed me a newsmagazine with a story about America and Russia, one that had a picture of the new Russian leader, Yuri Andropov, on the cover. We read it together. It seemed that the people in both Russia and America were worried that the other country would start a nuclear war. It all seemed so dumb to me. I had learned about the awful things that had happened during World War II, so I thought that nobody would ever want to have another war. I told Mom that she should write to Mr. Andropov to find out who was causing all the trouble. She said, 'Why don't you write to him?' So I did."

Dear Mr. Andropov,

My name is Samantha Smith. I am ten years old. Congratulations on your

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new job. I have been worrying about Russia and the United States getting into a nuclear war. Are you going to vote to have a war or not? If you aren't please tell me how you are going to help to not have a war. This question you do not have to answer, but I would like to know why you want to conquer the world or at least our country. God made the world for us to live together in peace and not to fight.

Sincerely,
Samantha Smith

Samantha wrote on a lined piece of notepaper in the careful, looping script of ten-year-olds everywhere. Her father Arthur helped her mail the letter to "Mr. Yuri Andropov, The Kremlin, Moscow, USSR." Samantha was impressed that it cost so much to mail—forty cents. Her expectations were not high. "I thought I'd just get a form letter, like I did from the Queen of England"—to whom, at the age of five, she wrote a fan letter. Her father's expectations were zero. Samantha and her parents soon forgot about the letter.

Four or five months later, Samantha was summoned to the secretary's office of her elementary school and told that there was a reporter from the Associated Press on the telephone who wanted to speak with her. Samantha protested that there must be some kind of mistake. "Mrs. Peabody said, 'Well, did you write a letter or something to Yuri Andropov?'" She practically dragged me into the office and got me on the phone. And the reporter told me that there was an article in *Pravda* that talked about my letter, and there was even a picture of it."

Samantha managed to overcome her surprise and spoke with the reporter for a few minutes. A story went out over the news wires and the Associated Press sent a photographer to Manchester to take a picture of a grinning Samantha next to her father's manual typewriter. Meanwhile her father, a professor of English at the University of Maine, located a copy of *Pravda* and asked some colleagues in the Russian department to translate the article. *Pravda* indeed quoted excerpts of Samantha's letter and said, in reference to her question about why Andropov might want to conquer the world: "We think we can pardon Samantha her misleadings, because the girl is only ten years old."

Samantha was understandably pleased that *Pravda* had printed her letter. But she was miffed that no attempt had been made to answer her questions. So she wrote a second letter, this time to the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin. She asked him whether

Mr. Andropov was planning to answer her questions, and added that "I thought my questions were good ones and it shouldn't matter if I was ten years old."

Apparently, that did it. A week later the Soviet embassy called Samantha at home to say that a reply from Yuri Andropov was on its way. Within a few days, the postmistress of Manchester, Maine, called to say that a peculiar envelope had arrived via registered mail for Samantha. The letter, typed in Russian on cream-colored paper and signed in blue ink, was dated April 19, 1983, and was accompanied by an English translation.

Dear Samantha,

I received your letter, which is like many others that have reached me recently from your country and from other countries around the world.

It seems to me—I can tell by your letter—that you are a courageous and honest girl, resembling Becky, the friend of Tom Sawyer in the famous book of your compatriot Mark Twain. This book is well-known and loved in our country by all boys and girls.

You write that you are anxious about whether there will be a nuclear war between our two countries. And you ask are we doing anything so that war will not break out.

Your question is the most important of those that every thinking man can pose. I will reply to you seriously and honestly.

Yes, Samantha, we in the Soviet Union are trying to do everything so that there will not be war between our countries, so that in general there will not be war on earth. This is what every Soviet man wants. This is what the great founder of our state, Vladimir Lenin, taught us.

Soviet people well know what a terrible thing war is. Forty-two years ago, Nazi Germany, which strived for supremacy over the whole world, attacked our country, burned and destroyed many thousands of our towns and villages, killed millions of Soviet men, women, and children.

In that war, which ended in our victory, we were in alliance with the United States; together we fought for the liberation of many people from the Nazi invaders. I hope that you know this from your history lessons in school. And today we want very much to live in peace, to trade and cooperate with all our neighbors on this earth—with those far away and those near by. And certainly with such a great country as the United States of America.

In America and in our country there are nuclear weapons—terrible weapons that can kill millions of people in an instant. But we do not want them ever to be used. That's precisely why the Soviet Union solemnly

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declared throughout the entire world that never—never—will it use nuclear weapons first against any country. In general we propose to discontinue further production of them and to proceed to the abolition of all the stockpiles on earth.

It seems to me that this is a sufficient answer to your second question: “Why do you want to wage war against the whole world or at least the United States?” We want nothing of the kind. No one in our country—neither workers, peasants, writers nor doctors, neither grown-ups or children, nor members of the government—wants either a big or a “little” war.

We want peace—there is something that we are occupied with: growing wheat, building and inventing, writing books and flying into space. We want peace for ourselves and for all peoples of the planet. For our children and for you, Samantha.

I invite you, if your parents will let you, to come to our country, the best time being the summer. You will find out about our country, meet with your contemporaries, visit an international children’s camp—“Artek”—on the sea. And see for yourself: in the Soviet Union—everyone is for peace and friendship among peoples.

Thank you for your letter. I wish you all the best in your young life.

Y. Andropov

Andropov’s letter arrived at 8 A.M. on Monday, April 26, 1983. When Samantha got home from school that afternoon, the lawn in front of her house was blanketed with reporters and cameramen. Before the night was out, she and her mother, Jane, were on a jet chartered by CBS and NBC to New York City for a round of appearances on the *Today Show*, *CBS Morning News*, and *Nightline*, as well as more interviews with major newspapers, radio stations, and wire services. A few days later, Samantha and her mother were off to California for an appearance on the *Tonight Show*. Samantha’s prior traveling experience had been limited to visiting her grandparents in Florida and Virginia. Her reaction? “It was different,” giggles Samantha, “but it was *fun!*”

Samantha flips through the pages of her book, *Journey to the Soviet Union*, to her favorite part of her trip: her visit to Camp Artek on the Black Sea. She describes the elaborate welcome the Soviet children gave her; the Young Pioneers’ swimming contests and games; her late-night whispers with her best friend, thirteen-year-old Natasha, and the other girls in the camp dormitory. “The kids had lots of questions about America—especially about clothes and music,” reads Samantha, her

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index finger tracing the words. "They were all interested in how I live and sometimes at night we talked about peace, but it didn't really seem necessary because none of them hated America, and none of them wanted war. Most of the kids had relatives or friends of their families who died in World War II, and they hoped there would *never* be another war. It seemed strange even to talk about war when we all got along so well together. I guess that's what I came to find out. I mean, if we could know our friends by just getting to know each other better, then what are the countries really arguing about? Nothing could be more important than *not* having a war if a war would kill everything."

Now it is time for questions. A dozen seventh and eighth graders from Gorham Junior High School take turns stepping to a floor microphone and reading queries from slips of paper. Samantha stands with her hands folded a little stiffly on the podium, her face intent as she concentrates on hearing each question. Her answers are brief and to the point.

"How have your attitudes toward Russia changed?"

"At first, when I hadn't gone over there, some of my parents' friends said it was sort of gray and dull. And the news was always saying that it wasn't nice at all, and that they were mean and truly wanted to kill our enemies and stuff. But when I got there I found out that the people were really friendly and very down-to-earth. They certainly didn't want to kill us at all because they had gone through such tragedies earlier in their lives."

"Do you have any message to give people in the United States?"

"Well, I feel that one of the reasons we are having problems with them is that many of the people in the United States government have not actually gone over there for a tour, or to actually meet any of our children or other adults in the Soviet Union. Half the adults seem to think that they are our enemies, but they haven't even been over there to experience meeting people in the Soviet Union to see what they are like. I have experienced that and I have found out that the people in the Soviet Union are very friendly and they're trying as hard as we are to have peace."

"Would you like to visit the Soviet Union again?"

"If anybody wants to invite me, I'd be happy to go."

"What do you see for our future? Do you think it's possible to have world peace?"

"I think there's a way we can have peace among children. As

the adults—I think it’s possible. But, well, I can’t exactly do that much about it, because I’m a kid. I would like to be able to do something about it, but I can’t. I think we can achieve peace if we try hard enough.”

The questions end, the audience gives her a grateful ovation, and Samantha exits to a chair on the side of the room. While other children make presentations, her young-lady chic disappears as she sprawls across her father’s lap like a giant kitten. Samantha is tired. It is already an hour past her usual bedtime. But she and her father can’t slip away just yet; a short photo session is scheduled after the program. Then they must drive nearly two hours from Gorham back to Manchester, for tomorrow is a school day. Samantha Smith is in the seventh grade.

One would never suspect that a connection had been forged between Manchester, Maine (population 1,940) and Moscow upon driving into this sleepy one-stoplight hamlet just west of Augusta. Though a sign says the town was founded in 1775, it still has a certain raw, almost frontier look, with its general stores clustered around a highway intersection and clapboard houses scattered amidst surrounding farms, woods, and orchards. The Smiths live down one of many curving lanes, in a two-story white house with dark green shutters and a backyard of mixed pine-birch woods. It is quiet and peaceful; evening grosbeaks come to the feeder at their kitchen window.

A week after the Gorham speech, Samantha lounges on the couch reading a “Garfield the Cat” book and good-humoredly waiting for the interview to begin. It is hard not to gasp at first sight of her. She is wearing hot pink fuzzy socks, pink nylon running shorts, and a yellow sweatshirt with “California” scripted across it in electric blue. Her lips and fingernails are fulgent pink. And her straight brunette hair has been cramped into the thin tendrils of a brand-new perm.

She stands up and puts aside her book to shake hands. It is an adult gesture, but she steps much closer than adult body language would dictate. The effect is breathtaking. After delivering a dazzling smile, she reclines again on the pillows, one shaved leg stretched insouciantly across the couch, one hand touching her unfamiliar curls.

Looking at Samantha is an exercise in cognitive dissonance. There on the sofa, she is a sophisticated little aristocrat, her makeup impeccable, her manner urbane; she is also a twelve-year-old girl who doesn’t question her father’s right to decide what she wears in public and who

goes to bed at 8:30 P.M. in her lavender flannel pajamas. Her voice has lowered since her early talk show days; she can now sound like a teenage girl if she chooses, or she can suspend that maturity and trip lightly through her words in flawless little-girl-speak. Is she a girl, or is she a young woman?

It is not only the contradictions inherent in her age that make meeting Samantha somewhat disconcerting. Like the people of the country she became famous for visiting, Samantha is not who one would expect her to be based on newspaper accounts. One expects to find an earnest, studious child who regularly peruses the *New York Times* and keeps up with the latest debates on arms control. One expects a prepubescent Helen Caldicott. "Some people think that because of what's happened to me I'm a real superperson peacemaker," says Samantha with a tiny inhalation of breath before she speaks. "But I'm not really into politics that much. I'm just *concerned*, and this is just sort of happened."

One expects a prodigy, but instead finds a normal twelve-year-old girl with typical twelve-year-old interests and perspectives. Samantha watches a fair amount of television. She giggles a great deal—fine-tuned, highly-modulated giggles that can convey intricate shades of meaning. She watches—and giggles at—Bugs Bunny shows in the morning while she eats her Cheerios. She chews gum and has a weakness for popsicles. She is at the age when boys have become intriguing, and when few things can keep her in the bathroom longer than getting ready for a Friday night school dance.

Once the initial surprise is over, though, one also realizes that it is her very normality that has made her such an effective symbol of her generation. In a culture jaded by hothouse-grown child performers, Samantha is reassuringly genuine. Her brand of childish directness, bereft of learned and fuzzifying complexities, has made many an ideologue wince. Going to the Soviet Union allowed her to come to her own conclusions—a fact that delights her fans and irritates her detractors.

"All the children here, and all the children over in the Soviet Union are not enemies," declares Samantha. "For some really strange reason the grown-ups that rule don't get along. Whenever you want to do something at home, and you ask your parents if you can, they always say 'Give me two good reasons.' But here the grown-ups never give any good reasons for why they don't get along. Maybe it's time we did a little back talk," she says, impishly eyeing her father, who has just settled in a armchair.

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Because she so obviously lacked a political ax to grind, public interest in Samantha's conclusions was keen. She could be trusted to tell things the way she saw them. Within a few weeks of the letter's arrival, Andropov's invitation was confirmed: the Soviets offered to provide an all-expenses-paid two-week sojourn for Samantha and her parents. And so as Samantha's July 7, 1983, departure date drew near, the Smith family packed bags full of Maine College T-shirts and pennants as gifts for their Soviet hosts, and the Western press prepared to record her every impression.

Immediately after her Aeroflot jet from Montreal arrived in Sheremetevo Airport, Samantha was besieged by reporters asking her what she thought of Moscow. Blinking sleepily under the bright camera lights, she said she thought the airport looked a lot like American airports, and soon she was whisked away to bed in a deluxe suite in the Sovietskaya Hotel, which is normally reserved for visiting dignitaries. The next day, she rode in a black limousine accompanied by a full police motorcade to Red Square, where she toured the palaces and churches of the Kremlin, visited Lenin's tomb and study ("Lenin," she explains, "is sort of like their George Washington") and laid flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Samantha's summary: "Moscow was pretty exciting, we got to go to all these tourist places. But after awhile it started to get boring, and my feet started hurting because the shoes that looked best on me were too small."

Much more to her liking, and her favorite part of the trip, was her visit to a large youth camp called Artek in the Crimea. Samantha was met at the airplane by a busload of Young Pioneers her own age and welcomed to Artek by a cheering bleacherful of uniformed children with balloons and banners, mostly in Russian, but one in English: "We are glad to meet you in our Artek." Older children in folk costumes presented her with a traditional bread-and-salt welcome. "I didn't know whether I was supposed to eat it at first or not," says Samantha, "but finally I did and it was delicious."

Samantha donned a Pioneer uniform (white blouse, turquoise skirt, and white knee socks) and the white chiffon bow that Soviet girls often wear in their hair, but eschewed wearing the red Pioneer neckerchief, which symbolizes devotion to Communism. According to Samantha, "The Young Pioneers are a little like Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts except that their activities teach them about Communism instead of democracy."

She had expected, though, that the camp would be “more wilderness with tents and stuff.”

Samantha opted to spend the night in one of their dormitories instead of in the hotel with her parents. A thirteen-year-old blue-eyed blond named Natasha, who spoke fairly good English, soon became her best friend. They played together on the beach, took a boat ride to near Yalta (where Samantha dangled her legs in President Roosevelt’s chair and tossed wine bottles stuffed with messages from the deck of the boat into the Black Sea. “Hopefully we will all have peace for the rest of our lives,” read Samantha’s message. By this time she knew enough “adolescent Russian,” as her father puts it, to be able to sing Russian songs on the boat with the other children, arms locked together as they sway back and forth.

Samantha would have liked to stay longer. “They have hundreds of tons of jellyfish that don’t sting in the Black Sea, and you can have jellyfish fights. It’s wonderful. They’re about the size of your palm, and a kind of gooey.” But the camp session was ending, and after a final evening of closing ceremonies that included a parade, fireworks, skit dancing, and costume shows, the campers went home and Samantha flew to Leningrad.

There her every move continued to get prime-time coverage in the American, European, and Soviet press as photo opportunities unfolded. Samantha in a colorful Russian folk costume made for her by other children. Samantha eating enormous raspberries on a collective farm. Samantha at the Kirov Ballet trying to put on a signed pair of toe shoes given her by the prima ballerina, Alla Cisova. Samantha accepting flowers from a Soviet sailor on the ship *Aurora*, which fired the first shot of the Russian Revolution. Samantha laying a wreath at the Piskarskoye Memorial to the nearly half-million citizens of Leningrad who died in the nine-hundred-day siege by the Nazis during World War II. Samantha was on “every other night on Soviet TV,” says her father Arthur “and probably has greater public recognition there than she does here.”

Then it was back to Moscow on an overnight train for a final whirlwind of activities, including visits to the Toy Museum, the Moscow Circus and the Puppet Theater; a chance to try out a racing bicycle in the Velodrome of the Krylatskoye Olympic Center; and a lesson from expert gymnasts on how to twirl ribbons.

“Kids have written to say they think she was very brave to go to the Soviet Union, but she doesn’t think she was, and I would have to agree.

says Arthur Smith. "But what she did that *was* very difficult was to carry off that trip. Two weeks of twelve-hour days, and she greeted everyone everywhere with enthusiasm, eagerness, and good humor. God only knows I wasn't in good humor for twelve hours a day for two weeks."

"I'll vouch for that," interjects Samantha's mother, Jane, who has also joined the interview.

"And Samantha, I thought, did a helluva good job of doing that, and I don't think people realize what an effort that was. It looked like a lot of fun, and it *was* a lot of fun for her, but I also think very few people could've done what she did."

In addition to her hectic tourist schedule, Samantha's appointment calendar would have made a visiting dignitary envious. Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space and the current president of the Soviet Women's Committee, invited Samantha and her family over to her office for tea. US Ambassador to the Soviet Union Arthur Hartman and his wife Donna also had the Smiths to their house for an American lunch of hamburgers and French fries—which, after a steady diet of Chicken Kiev, tasted great to Samantha. And suspense built in the Western press about the possibility that Samantha might meet in person with Andropov, who had been out of public view for some time.

Although the Soviets never made any promises one way or the other, the Smiths held out hope that they might see Andropov until the last day of their trip. Then one of Andropov's deputies, Leonid Zamyatin, came to Samantha's hotel room bearing gifts with Andropov's calling card—a silver samovar (teamaker), a china tea service, and a hand-painted laquered box (*palekh*) with a painting of Red Square and St. Basil's Cathedral. Samantha, in turn, presented him with the gift she had brought for Andropov: a book of Mark Twain speeches. "I'm sure we would have met him if it had been at all possible," says Arthur Smith. "But it wouldn't have been particularly suitable to have somebody who was in dialysis and too frail to stand up be forced to endure a photo session. They said he was busy, but we just assumed he was sick."

Samantha flew home with scrapbooks of photographs of her visit, seventeen suitcases filled with gifts, and some very strong opinions. "Things are just the same over there. I mean, they're just people. There's nothing wrong with them, they're just like us."

"Well, things *are* a little different there," cautions her father.

"Well, yeah, it's a lot stricter there, but that's nothing to *accuse* them of. It's just a different way of living. It doesn't hurt us, and it's not like the Nazis or anything."

Before she wrote her letter, Samantha says, "I really think I got [the Soviets] mixed up with Hitler a little bit. Because in my letter I said why do you want to conquer the world? So at that point I thought [Andropov] was Hitler and I thought he was mean and he wanted to just bomb us all off." She has since learned a great deal, she confides. And while she's never heard of the term "citizen diplomacy," she has great faith in what it can do. "People should know that peace is always possible if we try hard enough. Us kids have made friends, and we're really no different, just smaller versions of grown-ups."

Samantha has a scheme in mind to take advantage of the friendliness of young people. She calls it the Granddaughter Exchange. The idea is to take the granddaughters—and, she supposes, the grandsons too—of the world's heads of state "and just scatter them all over the place," she says with a wave of her arms. "Then they could come back and tell people what the place was like, and hopefully, usually, most of the news would be, these other people are nice people."

But while Samantha has not forgotten about the concerns that launched her into the public eye, she believes that solving the grown-ups' problems is primarily a job for grown-ups. She admits that she does get tired of being asked the same questions over and over again about world peace. Asked if she feels a strong urge to speak at peace symposiums like the one in Gorham, she pauses for a moment and her forehead wrinkles. "I don't feel a *need* to go and speak, but I mean it's nice to go and do it. It's a good idea. But there's nothing necessarily *pushing* me to do it."

A few grumblers suspect that Samantha's parents are pushing her. But Arthur and Jane Smith have, to all appearances, resisted the temptation to become stage parents. Arthur Smith is a tall, unruffled, laconic man, who prefers nodding his head to saying the word "yes." When he really intends to praise someone, Samantha's father calls them "down-to-earth," an adjective that fits him nicely. He refers to Samantha's letter to Andropov and subsequent invitation to the Soviet Union as her "experience." The events that followed her return—a plethora of talk shows, a children's conference in Japan, a television special of interviewing Democratic presidential candidates, a visit with the children of Soviet diplomats in Washington, DC—he refers to as her "adventure."

Arthur Smith quit his post as an English professor at the University of Maine to handle Samantha's busy schedule. "I wanted to make sure there was somebody there to make order and sense" out of the offers that were pouring in, he explains. Her mother, Jane—a thin, pretty woman who, like Samantha, transforms when she smiles—works as an

administrator in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services in an agency that finds placements for abused and neglected children in state custody. Samantha's television and book fees are barely covering the loss of income from Arthur's former job. But "she enjoys it," says her father, "and I wanted to make this experience available to her."

When Samantha's letter was published in *Pravda* and the first trickle of news stories began, her father was quick to caution her not to let this attention go to her head. "Dad said, 'Oh, it'll last a couple of days,'" giggles Samantha. Arthur Smith sighs. "All through this I'm saying to Samantha, now remember, this is all going to be gone next week." "Then the letter gets here," continues Samantha, "and it's like ZOOM, everyone's here, it's like a magnet. It's like, Daddy, you *lied*."

The press was delighted by the fairy-tale quality of this unlikely penpal relationship and curious about this unexpected glimpse into the character of the new Soviet leader. Anyone in Samantha's shoes would doubtless have become famous for awhile. Reporters sopped up every detail of her all-American girlishness with glee. Yes, she has freckles. Yes, she plays softball. Yes, she doesn't like homework. Yes, she sleeps with stuffed toys and likes Michael Jackson and has a Chesapeake Bay retriever for a best friend.

But the press's fascination was kept alive by Samantha's own "production values." Her aplomb at handling microphones and her ability to look directly into the camera and encapsulate her thoughts into a single line soon endeared her to network news producers. About what good her letter and trip might do: "I really hope it made the heads of state think it would be better not to have bombs, because there might be a mistake." About whether she favored a nuclear freeze: "I suppose so. It would be better if we had destruction [of nuclear bombs], but I'm for a freeze, too." Samantha's opinions were soon being solemnly broadcast to the world.

The hot pursuit of the press at first astonished, then amused Samantha. "It got to be kind of funny, you know? At how *strange* these people can be. They're so desperate, for what? Does it really make a difference?" Samantha is an equanimous child, but she found some of the reporters' questions tiresome, and she developed a fine disregard for the logic of competitive news businesses. "People kept asking me the same questions over and over again, and I asked them, why can't you ask me a question, and then pass around the answers? I mean, how stupid can you get? Here it costs a fortune to come talk to me, when they could simply get it from another reporter."

In Montreal, as she was about to board the plane for Moscow Canadian Mounted Police were unable to restrain a gaggle of reporters who shoved so many microphones into her face that she inadvertently bit metal. Samantha once told David Hartmann on ABC news that she had dreamed about a cameraman "walking backwards who stepped on my big toe and broke my whole foot." But she says the occasional inconvenience caused by the press has been far outweighed by how much fun she has had from all the hoopla. "Sometimes I'd think, I wish it wasn't happening, because of the reporters and stuff, but then I'd think about getting to California and doing the other things that come with it and I'd think, on the other hand, I *like* this."

But even as millions of people on both sides of the Cold War were falling in love with Samantha, others were plainly irritated by this squeaky wheel who had dared infiltrate the adult world of diplomacy. Even the staff writers of *People Magazine* were scrambling to get to Manhattan and find out the names of Samantha's dog and cats, scores of editors chastised the American people for being duped into believing that Khrushchev's message might be sincere.

While no editorialists went so far as to suggest that Samantha herself was devious, the Soviets were castigated for taking advantage of Samantha's naïveté. *U.S. News and World Report* ran a story by Nicolai Daniloff bluntly headlined: "Samantha Smith: Pawn in Propaganda War." Opined the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, "Although the letter surely provided Samantha with an enormous thrill, it nevertheless was a manipulative and exploitative thing to do to an innocent ten-year-old." A Japanese newspaper cartoon portrayed Samantha as Little Red Riding Hood and Khrushchev as the Wicked Wolf.

The entire correspondence, it was a prevailing theory, had been orchestrated by the Soviets to help lull the American people into believing that the Soviets desire peace, while designs to take over the world were in progress within the Kremlin. Some speculated that the letter and invitation were the results of months of planning; KGB agents snooping around in Maine had profiled the Smiths, decided that Samantha had just the right combination of poise, pulchritude, and peaceful rhetoric, and then decided to pluck her letter from the pile. Others took a less extreme view, saying that the Soviets had probably had nothing so grandiose in mind when they first printed Samantha's letter in *Pravda*, but, noting the Western press's response to the letter's publication, had smelled a public-relations move, and were simply lucky to have picked a child capable of handling the media blitz.

Not everyone was quite so ready to write off Andropov's gesture as meaningless, though. While his letter was "excellent propaganda," said the *Lewiston Daily Journal* of Maine, "at the same time it contained within it a hint of sincerity." A few other editorialists pointed out that propaganda or no, it was encouraging that the Soviet Union wished to underscore an image of itself as a nonaggressive, peace-loving nation. In the elaborate morass of diplomatic hinting, it could perhaps be taken as a positive signal of Soviet interest in improved relations.

If it was such a hint, it was one the Reagan administration chose to ignore. President Reagan conspicuously refrained from publicly acknowledging Samantha's letter. "Our contact with the Reagan administration has been, on their part, furtive," remarks Arthur Smith. "The White House called the town of Manchester to verify her existence, and George Bush's people made an inquiry, but it seems to me that Reagan has tried to avoid Samantha."

When she was first interviewed on the NBC *Today Show*, Jane Pauley asked her in a voice and manner nearly as sweet as Samantha's own: "Samantha, do you know what the word 'propaganda' means?" Samantha did not. But she certainly does now. After tightening her face into an exaggerated blink, she opens her eyes and replies in her lilting little-girl voice, "Well, I think they were using me, but it was propaganda for peace. I mean, what were they doing it for, so that they could have a war? It doesn't exactly fit together. So it was propaganda for peace, to get me over there so I could see what it was like, and come back and tell people how nice it was."

Her parents, too, are aware that Samantha's trip emphasized a rosy picture of Soviet life. But they believe that the American press usually presents only the dark side of the Soviet Union and that Samantha's trip provided a healthy counterbalance. "The Soviets certainly wished to be seen as something other than what the Western press often portrays them as," says Arthur Smith. "But the truth is that the Soviet Union is a nation of 270 million people, and these people have families, and aspirations for their children, and that's a side we almost never hear about. The very idea," he shakes his head, "that they could have *engineered* Samantha's experience is absurd. My feeling is that this kind of thing comes from those junk spy novels, which used to be about the Nazis and now are about the KGB, in which the Soviets are seen to be the most manipulative exploiters of the human psyche you can imagine."

Arthur Smith has evidence against such a conspiracy theory. Before

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forwarding Andropov's letter to Samantha, the Soviet embassy called Arthur to ask permission to release it to the press. If he had said no, he believes, the Soviets would have kept it quiet. And he and Jane dismiss as ridiculous the notion that the KGB investigated them in advance. "My response to that," he says, "is that Samantha's reaction to all this could not even have been predicted by her own parents." Indeed, the KGB would have been inept to have chosen as their public relations pawn a girl who was too bashful to try out for the fifth-grade play. "I was really shy," confirms Samantha. "I *hated* to meet new people. When my mom had friends of hers over it was like, 'Hi, um, I'm going to my room now,' and they'd never see me again."

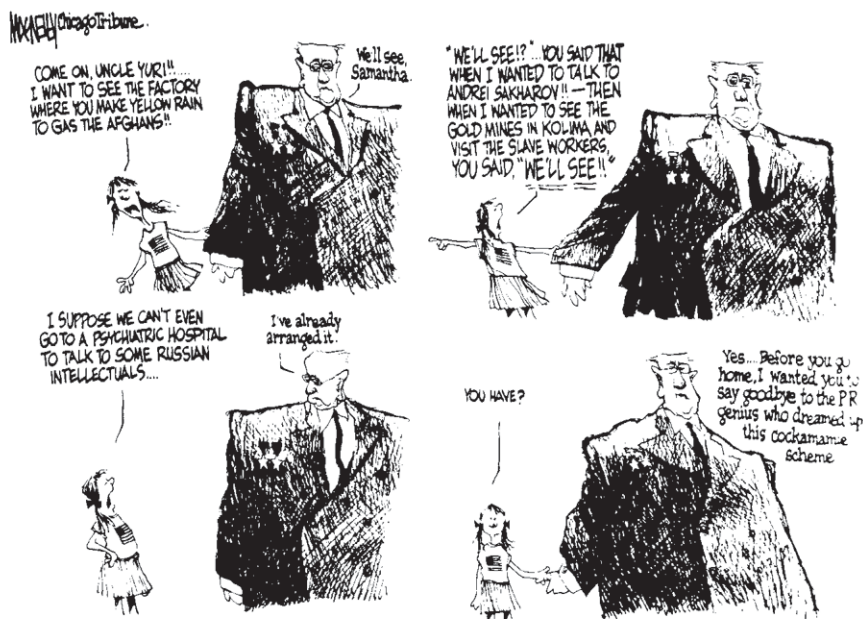
And even if it was primarily meant as a good public-relations move, her father points out, it could have backfired rather spectacularly. "They took an enormous risk in issuing this invitation to a ten-year-old, who could very well have, even with the best of intentions, headed off on such a journey and after three days said, 'I hate this, I want to go home,' right in front of the cameras. And since the American press was always tailing us, the Soviets would not have been able to guard against that.

"The press kept saying, 'You only saw what they wanted you to see.' Well, the truth is we saw exactly what we asked to see," he adds. Prior to their journey, the Soviets asked the family to write or call the Soviet Embassy in Washington whenever they thought of something they might like to see or do. Once they arrived in Moscow, the Soviets went over each item in their itinerary with them and asked them if they wanted to make any changes.

"Some people ask," says Samantha, "'Well, don't you think they set it all up?' Well, *of course* they did," she says in her somewhat exasperated, almost-adolescent voice. "I mean, what are they going to do, show me the grossest parts of all, or just let me wander around on my own? *Of course* not. If I had a new friend come over to my house I wouldn't take them down in the basement where it was all cluttered. Here it's an invitation from the Soviet premier, and what are they supposed to do, tell me to get lost or something? I'm sure they're going to say, here are some tickets, go have a good time, 'bye.'"

Nor could the Soviets have prevented Samantha from announcing a sudden change in her itinerary. At the top of the stairs in their house is an original cartoon by MacNelly from the *Chicago Tribune* that the Smiths say is their favorite. It shows a pigtailed and pouty Samantha tugging on the sleeve of an enormous and stern-looking Andropov.

Citizen Diplomats



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"Obviously," says Arthur Smith, "the Soviets put themselves in the kind of position where Samantha could have said, okay, we want to see the silos outside of the such-a-place, in front of all the cameras, including all of the Western journalists, and terrifically embarrassed our hosts. What the American journalists never seemed to catch on to was that the Soviets were really at great risk in this whole enterprise. We could have been ready for some kind of stunt activity, and the child certainly could have been very unpredictable."

Indeed, there were some who urged the Smiths to use Samantha's trip to pull a surprise political move on Andropov. Before leaving, they were besieged with letters, telegrams, and phone calls from Soviet Jewish émigrés in Europe, Israel, and the United States pleading with Samantha to hand-deliver emigration requests for relatives in the Soviet Union. The Smiths, perplexed at suddenly finding themselves in the middle of one of the stickiest aspects of Soviet-American relations, finally decided to take the letters and deliver them to an official in the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

A number of the reporters who tailed Samantha through the Soviet

Union couldn't resist taking jibes at the Soviets to demonstrate that *they* weren't being fooled. The *Boston Globe*, for example, called Camp Artek "a symbol of Soviet socialist hypocrisy . . . an exclusive summer camp for the sons and daughters of the Soviet elite." Official Soviet descriptions of Artek describe it as a competitive merit camp, with selection based on scholastic, athletic, and leadership abilities. According to Arthur Smith, the truth is probably something in between—some children get there because of pull, others because of merit. But implying that admission to Artek was solely a matter of political privilege is about as accurate, he says, "as a Soviet journalist describing Stanford University as a place reserved for the children of the ruling capitalistic elite."

To offset all that footage of smiling, laughing Soviet children in skits and swimming contests, a CBS correspondent assured viewers that "Artek is putting on its happiest face for Samantha." The network dug up a Soviet film showing Young Pioneers going through paramilitary training: learning to assemble submachine guns, patrolling beaches at night with automatic weapons, and enduring rigorous obstacle courses. The editorial message was clear: under Artek's smiling and sunny surface lurks a Communist boot camp. "There will be no night patrol for Samantha," the correspondent ominously concluded.

Arthur Smith shakes his head. "My view of the press has altered more than my view of the Soviets. You understand a lot more about journalism when it's you they're writing about." He recalls passing out Russian copies of Andropov's letter to reporters and telling them with a straight face that the Russian alphabet was just like English, only it has to be read in a mirror. "And you know a couple of them actually *believed* me for awhile," he says with a sigh.

Arthur worries that the American people are not really aware of who makes the decisions that affect what news they hear. "You know exactly what to expect from *Pravda*, and most Russian citizens do too, and they're good at reading it and understanding what it means between the lines. However, I don't think a lot of Americans understand how complicated the distortion of the information they're receiving can be."

When Samantha first returned from the Soviet Union she was, as one commentator put it, "hotter than a patty melt in a microwave." Appearances on the *Tonight Show*, the *Phil Donahue Show*, and *Nightline* followed in rapid succession. "It was a little like a weary Dorothy returning from the land of Oz" remarked one television station, "only in this case she never met the Wizard." In December 1983 she and her

mother were invited to Japan, where she met local officials and told six hundred of her peers at a children's symposium on science, technology, and the future: "The year 2010 can be the year when all of us can look around and see only friends—no opposite nations, no enemies, no bombs."

Meanwhile, the Disney Channel had approached the Smiths with an offer for Samantha to do her own ninety-minute television special interviewing the Democratic presidential candidates about issues of concern to children. The program, which aired in February 1984, was called "Samantha Smith Goes to Washington," and it unleashed a fresh torrent of sarcasm from editorial commentators. "In other times, such a lovely child would have wanted to be Shirley Temple. Now she wants to be Dan Rather," lamented an editor of the *New Republic*.

Nonetheless, all of the Democratic candidates except for Walter Mondale and Gary Hart took Samantha and her constituency seriously enough to agree to be interviewed. Dressed in preppy tweed blazers and skirts, Samantha found life on the other side of the interviewing process to be a bit nerve-racking, and more work than she anticipated. "I had to stay up every night writing up my questions, and it took so long. I couldn't even watch television." Samantha was most nervous with her first subject—Reubin Askew—but she relaxed by the time she got her final interviewees. Most of the candidates used her questions as springboards for avuncular replies about the dangers of the current administration's economic, environmental, and foreign policies.

Samantha's early flush of enthusiasm for journalism soon faded, however, and she began drifting away from her Dan Rather role toward the Shirley Temple end of the television spectrum. Offers from Hollywood continued to pour in and she played a bit part in a sitcom the following fall. In March 1985 she made a pilot for a television series starring Robert Wagner called *Lime Street*. A member of the "adventure-detective" species, the show features an insurance investigator with two loving daughters, a princess, and a parachute escape from a plane that catches on fire. Samantha plays the oldest daughter. Does she want the show to become a series—which means that the family will have to move for at least six months to an apartment in Los Angeles? "Yeah!" she replies. "I really like California."

Acting, though, has not exactly been a lifelong dream. In her preletter days, she wanted to be a veterinarian. Even now, her parents have steered Samantha away from placing too many hopes on a Hollywood career. She describes with enthusiasm her latest Christmas present, a

camera: "If my acting career doesn't follow me, I'll probably become a free-lance photographer." Has she thought about how acting might fit in with her concerns about nuclear war? "No, I don't think they do fit together," says Samantha, wrinkling her nose. "It's really weird. They don't at all." Are Jane Fonda and Ed Asner possible role models? Samantha doesn't know who Jane Fonda and Ed Asner are. "Ed Asner's the head of the union you just joined," her father tells her. Samantha's expression signals a noncommittal "Oh."

The dangers of being immersed in Hollywood culture at such an impressionable age have not been lost on the Smiths, and "to a certain extent it's already happening," says Jane Smith. "She wants to have her hair changed every week and to wear the Hollywood fashions. But you can't tell how much of it is her age, and how much of it is Hollywood."

Samantha's parents are keeping a sharp eye out for any possible ill effects on their daughter. They are strict about her keeping up with homework. But the way they see it, Samantha's letter and trip have given her options that her parents could never have provided for her. They hope that Samantha's show-biz career will earn enough to pay for a good college education. In the meantime, culture-minded Arthur—a Shakespeare buff—would "like to see Sam get to Europe." But Samantha doesn't hesitate when asked where she would next like to travel. "Africa," she says.

It is past nine o'clock, and Samantha has already left, come back in pajamas (still wearing the hot pink socks, and with a blue kerchief now wrapped around the perm) to give good-night kisses to her parents, and tripped off to bed. Around the kitchen table, the discussion with her parents—about how Samantha has affected their lives, how she may have affected the world—goes late into the night.

"It remains to be seen what the total effect of her journey was," says Arthur Smith. "But I think Samantha's efforts were most helpful in causing people to think about the Soviet Union in a more human light. The more people who understand the Soviet Union in even somewhat objective terms the better, so that we can begin to think of them as people, not just as the evil empire—as a different system in the world, and not just an opposing system."

The Smiths were not active in the disarmament movement before Samantha wrote her letter. "But I certainly was in some sympathy with the freeze movement, and with the idea that it was more important to

talk to the Soviets than to blow the world up in a nuclear war," recalls Jane Smith. "It made sense to me that we should talk to them and learn to get along with them before we should expect them to change, rather than waiting for them to become like us before we will talk to them, which seemed a little absurd."

Arthur Smith points to two enormous orange filing cabinets in his study, both filled with Samantha paraphernalia. "We have a complete archive of anything you might want, from the *New Republic* to *Barbie Magazine*." Also in the file drawers are numerous video clippings of Samantha's television appearances. Her father pulls out a few and plugs them into their television.

One shows Samantha on the *Tonight Show* just after the letter from Andropov arrived. She wears jeans and wriggles with excitement in her chair. "Well, congratulations!" begins Johnny Carson. "Are you getting tired of answering all the questions that people like myself, and people on the news shows, are asking you?" "Yes," giggles Samantha. The audience roars. During her second appearance with Carson, after her trip to the Soviet Union, Samantha perches rather stiffly on the edge of her chair because "her friends at home," explains her mother, "had made fun of her for looking like a little girl dangling her legs the first time."

Watching the clips, the way other parents watch home movies of their kids, the Smiths are amazed at the difference between her first and second shows; her giggly nervousness is replaced by an almost frightening self-possession. Even her parents don't understand why Samantha has such an aptitude for the airwaves. Samantha is walking the high wire of stardom all by herself, and though her parents are ready to catch her at a moment's notice, they follow her progress with an amused, bewildered respect.

Samantha's mail indicates that she is still inspiring and provoking people to clarify their thoughts on Soviet-American relations. About six thousand letters have arrived for Samantha in the last two years, many from children throughout the world, including a hefty number from Soviet children. Frequently they send pictures of themselves and postcards of their towns or cities. Several hundred have yet to be translated. Arthur Smith has kept them all, bundled in rubber bands in boxes under his desk. Most are simply fan letters, but not all.

One letter, postmarked Portland, Maine, from a "Mrs. John Smith" with no return address, says: "You lovely, sweet people *must* wake up

and smell the coffee! You are all as gullible as two-year-olds taking candy from strangers. The Russians say the word 'peace' and you grab at it, and at them, like candy. Yes, they want peace—but how? Under *their* terms! They want to dominate the world and that includes us. Doesn't that frighten you? They will never change. They have used you poor people and my heart aches for you because you have been so blind."

Samantha pays little attention to the dozen or so letters that arrive every week; she obviously considers the mail to be Daddy's territory. Her father attempted to answer them at first with a thank-you card bearing Samantha's signature, but he gave up after the first six hundred or so, when he discovered that such answers only encouraged people to write for extra autographs, signed photographs, and other special requests. Ironically, the girl who has made something of a career out of getting a reply from a famous person has no time or interest in answering all of *her* mail. The exception is her regular correspondence with Natasha, her best friend in the Soviet Union.

Arthur Smith is saving those letters for a reason. One day, Samantha will go into the study, pull out those boxes, and start reading those letters herself. She will think about what has happened to her from a new perspective. She will have lost some of her childhood perspicacity, but she will have learned other things in the meantime.

Samantha is growing up. Any snapshot of her will soon be dated. Perhaps she will someday start perusing the *New York Times* and keeping up on the latest arms control debates. Perhaps she will someday become a "superperson peacemaker." Or perhaps she will remain only "concerned." Who Samantha Smith will become is very much an open question, but she appears quite capable of deciding that for herself. And if we are all lucky, the adult Samantha will be just as direct and original as she is now.

"It all seemed so dumb to me," Samantha said. Millions of people on both sides of the Cold War have thought the same thing. The difference is that Samantha acted. She and her journey to the Soviet Union will continue to intrigue, inspire, and infuriate the grown-ups. For her brilliance, or her crime, was to ask the questions that persist in hovering around the superpower conflict. Why are the Russians our enemies? Why must we have nuclear weapons? Why can't the grown-ups get along? Why . . . ?