

PROLOGUE

It has been said: “God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform.”

For me, I had already finished a glorious career working with the Old Believer students at 91 School in the Canby School District. I had interacted with the students, the parents, and the Old Believer community for twenty-seven years. I had even written a book about their fantastic story in coming to America to enjoy the freedom of religion that was offered in this country.

So, after having retired from teaching and spending time traveling around the world for twenty years, it was a surprise to hear from the wife of a former student inviting me to visit a private school that the Old Believers managed to create in 2020. I couldn't refuse.

What I saw was more than miraculous! I will try to convey in the following pages and chapters what I witnessed at the school, where I was honored to serve as a volunteer “resident story-teller” during the 2023-2024 school year.

Here is the school and the people who were instrumental in providing me the opportunity to teach about two hundred students stories in their parents' native language, Russian. Some of the students were children of students that I had taught in 91 School about forty years ago. To me it felt like I had come full circle in my teaching career and life of service in the Old Believer community.



Larry Semerikov – President, Ulita Seleznev – Principal, Katirina Alagoz – Secretary, Frosia Martishev – Office Assistant

The cover for the book is something that was a spiritual experience that happened during the tour of the school that I was initially given to familiarize me with the students, teachers and the classrooms. The experience occurred when I was taking pictures of various bulletin board exhibits and classroom settings. I noticed that every classroom had a colorful chart of “Twelve good friends” (i.e. virtues). I asked Frosia about the chart, and she graciously provided me with a free copy of the bilingual chart. I realized at that moment that the children were taught spiritual values by way of these charts and other religious tools at their disposal. The entire year was a learning experience for me, and it renewed my desire to learn more about the spiritual path that the Old Believers had preserved for centuries.

Eventually, the idea came to me to use 12 chapters for the book, with each virtue serving as the theme of the chapter. Thus, Truth was the theme of chapter 1, and so forth. The title was inspired by my interaction with the students, and seeing them as little monastic children in the service of God.



12 good friends (spiritual qualities): Truth, Purity, Love, Good Deeds, Obedience, Humility, Abstinence, Seek Wisdom, Not Judgement, Repentance, Prayer, Mercy