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ATG Interviews Dr. Vladimir N. Zaitsev

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College book store, St. Andrew’s book store and a va-
riety of other places. I signed at 24 stores around the state
during the fourth quarter, and I even drove to Dallas for a signing at
the home of my father and step-
mother. Every book store I’ve
spoken with has been interested in
the book. Some of the signnings
have been more suc-
cessful than others.

Square Books was a failure.
A man who helped me with my
marketing early on did some
very valuable things to help me,
but he didn’t contact Square until
early October about a proposed
late-October signing, and he had
reasoned that with the Ole Miss
football team out of town we
would have untroubled traffi-
c. He couldn’t have been more
wrong—it was a ghost town. I
agreed to a signing at Reeds in
Tupelo on a Monday, nine days
before Christmas, and despite
newspaper advertising (which the
store paid for), almost no one
came. On the other hand, we did
great at Lemuria and the
Book Mart (we sent personal-
ized invitations for those, since
I have family and friends going
way back in Jackson and Starkville), and the Books A
Million stores in Columbus,
Biloxi, Jackson, Meridian and
Hattiesburg were very fruitful.
I also had signnings at the local
Barnes & Noble, B. Dalton,
and Borders stores.

I really haven’t found any
prejudice at all toward the book
because it’s self-published, other
than the initial nay-saying from the
Clairion Ledger. The indi-
vidual stores are pleased with
the book, and nearly all the stores
I’ve signed have been pleased with
sales from my signnings.

ATG: What was it like deal-
ing with big online vendors like
Amazon or B&N? Have you
been successful with them?
Did you have to spend a lot on
advertising?

JL: We don’t have much on-
line exposure yet. Our own
com is one option, as is
www.amazon.com. Simply
filling out forms on line got us
into consideration for the
Amazon program, and we were
approved. We’ve only sold
to four books through Amazon,
actually. That doesn’t bother me
at all. Our listing on the Amazon
site gives us instant
credibility, and we make a lot more money selling them
through our own site. We’re on www.booksamillion.com
as well and have sold a handful of books that way. It’s
simply a matter of finding time to get into everything
and everywhere else, since I’m basically a one-man
band in my marketing efforts.

For promotional purposes, we ordered 10,000
foldout booklets which replicate the book cover and a
lot of Website information. There’s an order form as
well as the synopsis (from the book jacket) and the
Martin Hegwood quote. These look great and have
generated a lot of compliments from customers, store
owners and librarians. I hand them out at signings
and public appearances, and many stores have requested
them to display alongside my books at customer ser-
vice counters.

I’ve also gotten a lot of mileage out of my associa-
tion with WAPT-TV (I’ve been a part-time weather
anchor there since 1997). They’ve run several stories
on me, and I was a guest on their morning show in Sep-
tember. I’ve been on all of the stations around the state
when I was in those cities (Greenville, Meridian, Hattiesburg, Biloxi, Columbus and Tupelo), and the ra-
dio station I used to work for was kind enough to run a
free promo schedule for several weeks in November and
december. Many people heard it, and I have no
doubt it contributed to Jackson-area Christmas sales.
I’ve paid for no advertising other than a pair of small
newspaper ads (which I found didn’t help much) in Bay
St. Louis and Oxford.

ATG: One thing acquisitions librarians are get-
ting these days are more direct emails/mailings
from authors; I personally am a little leery of authors
hawking their own books. Have you done this kind
of marketing and if so, do you think it’s been successful?

JL: I am indeed approaching (via phone) librarians
around the state to garner interest in my book. I haven’t
run into anyone who isn’t interested in at least seeing a
brochure, and nearly all of those librarians are amenable
to buying through me. Most librarians around the state
are very interested in adding to their Mississippi author
collection, so that helps. I’ve contacted Birmingham
and New Orleans systems in the last few days, and it
will be interesting to see if there’s any interest there.
And I just recently decided to join Baker & Taylor,
which will make it easier for librarians to purchase the
book. [Editor’s Note: On the Record is in Books in Print
and can be ordered through any vendor.]

By March 31, 2003, I’m 100% sure we’ll have sold
about 1,500 books, which is half of the first printing.
I’m busy lining up signings for stores in March, April
and May, and some will be in Alabama and Louisiana.
There’s a lot of marketing I’m trying to do, such as en-
tering contests, lining up speaking engagements, sub-
mitting proposals to book clubs, which requires more
than I have. So I’m doing as much as I can, over a
long period of time. But I’m confident that we’ll run
out of books by the end of the year, or be close to it.

ATG: Will your book have a paperback edition?

JL: Kaye Wright gave copies of my book to edi-
tors at Harper Collins, St. Martin’s and Penguin/Putnam.
She suggested to all that they consider re-
leasing my book in trade paperback form. I’ve been
asked often if my book will come out in paperback, and
I’m going to do that some thought this spring. As far
as a second printing of On The Record, that’s possible.
I’m hopeful that another publisher will be on board at
some point and will handle that.

ATG: Are you working on another book?

JL: Later this spring I’ll hopefully be able to re-
sume work on Dead Air, which will be my follow-up
novel. I began work on it in 1998 and stopped when I
reached the point where I needed to conduct some ex-
tensive interviews. I look forward to getting back into
it. There’s also a full-complete, professionally edited
novel on my hard drive called The Magnolia Triangle.
This is a personal journey, and although the folks who’ve
read it rave, I am not sure it’s the right follow-up. Maybe
a good third novel.

ATG Interviews Dr. Vladimir N. Zaitsev
Director of the National Library of Russia
and President of the Russian Library Association

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Translated by Irina L. Lynden

We have asked Dr. Vladimir N. Zaitsev, cur-
cently Director of the Na-
tional Library of Russia
(NLR) and President of the
Russian Library Association,
to tell us about his career and
the NLR. The NLR, now
more than 200 years old, was
founded in 1795 by
Catherine the Great with
two purposes: to maintain com-
plete collections of Russian books and to make them
available for general public usage. By now its col-
clections comprise the world’s most complete reposito-
ries of books and periodicals in the Russian, Ukrai-
nian, and Belorussian lan-
guages. The library houses
an extensive stock of foreign
books, and an exceptionally
rich collection of incunabula
and rare books. The manu-
script collection of the NLR
ranks among the major col-
lections of this kind world-
wide. Today the library con-
tains over 33 million items,
including books, journals,
maps, microforms, prints, engravings, posters, play-
bills, electronic files, and other materials. — FL

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
ATG: Doctor Zaitsev, there are two national libraries in Russia, how did this happen?

VZ: Our library, the NLR, was first called the Imperial Public Library and served as a national depository for the Russian Empire. In 1917, after the revolution, it was renamed the State Public Library with the same mission. After the USSR was founded in 1922, and the capital moved from Petrograd to Moscow, it was decided to form the State Library of the entire USSR based on the library of the Rumiantsev Museum in Moscow. The State Library of the USSR was opened in 1923 and carried the name of Vladimir Lenin. So our State Public Library remained the national repository of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, one of the 15 republics within the USSR, while the Lenin State Library became the all-union repository of books published in the territory of the USSR. With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the mission of our Library didn’t change and we decided to put the word “National” into our title. As to the Lenin Library, it was assigned the same functions and called the Russian State Library rather than the State Library of the USSR. Thus, Russia has two national libraries with similar missions and functions.

ATG: Tell us about yourself.

VZ: I started my career outside the library field. After graduation from the Leningrad State Institute of Textile and Light Industry, I continued my research there as a senior research specialist, and later became a teacher at the Department of Materials Science. I defended my Ph.D. thesis in the area of the Physics and Mechanics of Polymers. Later I was invited to be an administrator in the municipal government of one of the regions of the city of Leningrad. I was in charge of social programs that included culture, science, education, and health care. As a part of my duties, I had to work with many cultural institutions including libraries. That’s why when I received a proposal from the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation to take leadership of one of the major libraries of the USSR, I accepted. Of course, I knew I should not anticipate an “easy life”, and yet it appeared that there were more challenges than I expected. Thus, as early as September 1, 1985 (more than 17 years ago), I became the Director of the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Leningrad.

ATG: Dr. Zaitsev what are some of the challenges you faced when you became Director of the Library?

VZ: It is difficult to tell you about all the challenges that I faced. I would like to remind you that my directorship coincided with dramatic changes in Russia. It was a time of instability, a time of political, social and economic change. Of course, here I can only mention some of the major challenges. My most acute concern at this time was buildings. When I became the director, the Library’s collection of 27 million items was divided among 11 buildings that were quite distant from one another. The construction of a new building, which had been approved by the Government of the USSR in 1973, had not yet begun. One of the largest buildings of the Library, the former Catherine Institute building had been under renovation since 1972. Thus, there were very few possibilities for housing new books and also one had to keep in mind the hazardous conditions in some parts of the building stacks. That’s why my first priority as a Director became getting support from the Russian government and city administration for the new building and renovation of the old ones, as well as equipping them. In 1985 the construction of the new building had finally started and the renovation of the Catherine Institute building also moved forward.

The city government gave us three new storage facilities and finally in 1988 the government of the USSR issued a new edict promising assistance to the Library for its equipment and collections. Unfortunately, due to political and economic crises in the whole country, the construction of the new building dragged on for 17 years. This April, President Putin will finally open the new 63,000 square meter building of the NLR. This building will allow us to move 14 million items and house them in an up-to-date facility.

ATG: Library buildings today need to be up-to-date electronically. How did you deal with this at the NLR?

VZ: When I came to the Library in 1985 there was not a single computer in it. All library processes were based on handwriting or typewriting. Today there are 850 computers at the NLR and 500 of them are networked. I would like to mention that this network connects to all buildings of the Library. We also have a powerful fiber optic line, which provides library staff and patrons with fast connections to the Internet. We have also created an electronic catalog, available via the Internet, of books in the Russian language from 1725 to date, foreign books and periodicals, 1994 to date, and electronic catalogs for a number of other collections. Anyone who is interested can go to our Website [www.nlr.ru]. Information there is in both the Russian and English languages.

ATG: Of course, providing for staff needs is a significant issue. How did you meet this challenge at the NLR?

VZ: One of the most vital issues that I faced when I began my directorship was a social one. Given the rather low level of salaries for librarians, I had to look for any possibility of additional financial support for the Library. In the late 1980’s, during Perestroika, the salaries and living conditions for librarians worsened which caused a great exodus from the field. To keep our highly professional librarians in the Library, we managed to obtain some benefits. First, through a federal program, staff at the NLR received fifty percent increases. Second, we also created a system of additional premium payments (similar to cash awards) that we added to regular salaries for long service, for professional achievements, for using automation in addition to manual processes, for difficult working conditions in some places in the library, and for the holidays. Finally, the Library built its own rest/vacation facility where employees can go with their families during summer vacations.

ATG: You had an excellent program for improving staff salaries and benefits. What other staff concerns were you able to address?

VZ: I also worked at improving the professional image of librarians in the country as well as respect for their work. I am pleased that, with my efforts, the Library received the status of “National Treasure of Russia.” This status, funded by the federal government, meant not only support for facilities, but 50 percent increases in salaries for staff, noted above. Further, we initiated an All-Russia Day of Librarians which was made a federal holiday by special act of the President of Russia. This holiday is on the 27th of May, the day of the founding of the Imperial Public Library (now called NLR).

It is hard to provide an evaluation of yourself and your own activities. However, I am pleased that, during my years as Director, I have managed to assemble a team of colleagues, who not only assist me in my work but also resolve problems that occur in running a major facility such as the NLR.

ATG: You have an impressive list of accomplishments. My next question is what are your plans for the future?

VZ: Our plans for the future are closely connected with developments in the library’s technical facilities and reorganization of the library processes with reference to the new electronic and telecommunication technologies. Besides traditional and electronic facilities, in the new building there will be a Cultural and Exhibit Center and a concert hall. In the main building, we are planning to open a Voltaire Center with his library, which was purchased in the 18th century by Catherine the Great. In the Catherine Institute building, we are creating a state of the art Computer Center for Youth and intend to develop and enlarge the music and newspaper departments. We will now have more comfortable conditions for serving patrons. Prior to the new building, we had a shortage of reader spaces and we had special reading rooms for different categories of researchers. With the opening of the new building we can offer a library card for each visitor and he/she can choose in what building he/she would like to work. I should add to this list of our goals — increasing access to foreign electronic resources. With our excellent computer facilities and telecommunication lines, the resolution of this task completely depends on financial support and at NLR we work hard on fund raising and public relations.

ATG: You mentioned several times the word, Perestroika, in reference to your activities. In your opinion how did Perestroika affect librarians and libraries in Russia?

VZ: It affected them dramatically and in many ways. Librarians are now very different from what they were in the sixties and seventies. It doesn’t relate as much to professionalism which was high in previous years, but it definitely relates to their active position in society. I would mention three major changes in the Russian library world. First, Russian librarians became active in international professional continued on page 35
programs and events. You can see them in large numbers at IFLA sessions, ALA conferences, at major book fairs, at workshops, and seminars. Second, Perestroika coincided with the technological revolution in Russian libraries. American libraries went through it in the late sixties and early seventies. Russia was late and we, in the hardship of Perestroika, had to leapfrog to achieve the technological level of Western libraries. Third, Russian librarians are more active in the political and social life of society. Only after Perestroika did Russian librarians unite in library associations. They elected their first members from the library community to local governments. They proposed and wrote a number of federal laws for libraries. They not only initiated these proposals but were also responsible for the text, e.g., the Federal Library Law which guarantees free access to information among other rights.

The first library association was the St. Petersburg Association in 1987 and, in 1994, the Russian Library Association was established. Very soon afterwards, the RLA elected me as its first president, and its office is now located in the NLR.

ATG: You are President of the Russian Library Association (RLA). Can you tell us more about RLA?

VZ: The process of democratization resulted in many changes not only in Russian society, but also on the Russian library scene. One of those changes is the foundation of the Russian Library Association. There are several professional organizations and unions in Russia but the largest is RLA. According to Russian legislation, RLA can include only corporate members. It has been seven years since it was created and currently there are 375 members of RLA, which comprises approximately 25,000 participating librarians. RLA is the main coordinating body for the library community in Russia having as its main goal unifying the efforts and supporting the activities of its members; preserving and developing librarianship, and raising the status of Russian libraries and the library profession in society. RLA takes a leadership role in developing cooperative projects, and I will mention some of them: creation of RUSMARC, the Russian national MARC format; a national program for preservation of book collections which worked in cooperation with Springer Verlag; Assistance to Access for Information which provides electronic access to journals from Springer and Academic Press — some 400 journals; and The Code of Ethics. The latter is a document created by a roundtable within RLA that is called Communication and Special Ethics for Librarians. These are the major projects.

ATG: I have seen you at many ALA conferences. Tell us what you learned about ALA which has been helpful to you as President of RLA?

VZ: Cooperation between American and Russian libraries has a long history, but relations between associations started only in 1995 when I first visited the ALA conference in Chicago and met with ALA’s President-Elect Betty Turock. We were eager to learn from the experience of other library associations and ALA, the oldest library association in the world, in particular. I visited not only the ALA conference but also its headquarters in Chicago. How do we use the ALA experience in the RLA? We took the same principle of annual conferences, in our case, in May. Each annual conference takes place in a different city. During our RLA annual conference, we also started to organize exhibitions with publishers and library vendors displaying books, equipment, and software and other technological products. We have developed very friendly relations with ALA, exchanging materials, publications, and delegations of librarians. In particular, we hosted former presidents of ALA, Betty Turock and Barbara Ford, and welcomed Gary Strong when he was an organizer of the Boston IFLA conference. We hope to develop more cooperation between our associations in the future.

ATG: Can you tell us more about NLR’s involvement in the International arena?

VZ: NLR became a member of IFLA in 1992. It also joined LIBER (League of European Research Libraries) in 1992. Together with other libraries in this organization we work on establishing access to the European cultural heritage. Since 1993, NLR has been a member of CERL (Consortium of European Research Libraries) working on a retrospective database of the European
As summer ALA in Toronto approaches, America’s academic librarians will be curious about the issues that confront their Canadian hosts. ATG asked Ernie Ingles, Canadian Librarian of the Year in 2001 and a longstanding force in the profession, if he would talk to us about what he sees. David Swords of YBP Library Services visited Ernie in Edmonton for ATG and filed the interview that follows.

Note from DS: The interview, conducted in late February over dinner at Jack’s Grill (one of the best restaurants in North America, I think), began with a conversation about retirement.

EI: I’ve built a log cabin in the Okanagan Valley. Oh, it’s a beautiful part of Canada, and it’s very mild in winter. Its winter climate would probably be a lot like Northern California’s. It’s a rare occasion the temperature falls below 35 to 40 Fahrenheit. It’s semi-arid so it’s usually in the 90°F plus in the summer. My daughter lives out there as well with her husband, and he has golfed 12 times this year.

ATG: This year? That’s like a miracle.

EI: God’s waiting room is what I call it. There are few drawbacks. One of the great benefits is the wine produced in the area. Superb!

(And we drank a bottle of one of them over dinner.)

ATG: Now that you bring it up, in the U.S. a lot of librarians are nearing retirement age. Is there talk about the same phenomenon here?

EI: Very much so. I am heading up a National Strategy for Human Resources, which is a planning coalition of representatives from across the country. We’re funded from the federal Government and from a number of library organizations, including the Canadian Library Association, Canadian Association of Research Libraries, and the Council of Large Urban Public Libraries. The coalition is doing a close study about what the human requirements for libraries are going to look like in the next ten plus years.

ATG: Any early information?

EI: We have the same demographics that you have, baby boom demographics. Drilling down a bit from aggregate census data we can see that Canada is actually about two or three years ahead of you, which is to say, we are reaching the retirement bulge a couple of years sooner than the U.S. It’s consistent with history. Our boys came home from World War II a bit faster than your boys did and started things going.

We have developed what we call the 8 Rs strategy (and I’m never going to get them all right. We started with 5 Rs then 6 Rs and now it’s 8). Let’s see, in no particular order, the 8 Rs are Recruitment, Retention, Retirement, Restructuring, Repatriation, Re-accreditation, Remuneration, and Rejuvenation. Did I get all eight? Well, well.

Whatever happens with regard to Recruitment, Retention, Retirement and most of the other Rs, the future probably boils down with some inevitability to Restructuring of how we do things in the libraries. But let’s come back to that. Here are some brief highlights about what each R means.

Remuneration. Our profession lacks the salary scale to encourage recruitment. But what can we do about it? What’s the strategy to put in place to try to make participation in the library profession attractive to those who clearly are choosing other careers? We have lost ground here in Canada over the years to other professions, nursing in particular. Our starting salaries for librarians are in the mid to high $30,000 (Canadian, which is about two-thirds of the U.S. dollar), maybe if you are really lucky in the low $40s. Nursing graduates are coming out in the low $50s and moving within nine years, as an example, to the mid 70s. Historically, we were ahead of nursing. The important question is why? Why haven’t we been able to demonstrate our value to society? Why are we losing ground?

Reappraisal. Over the next five to ten years one of our recruitment strategies has to include reappraisal. About 20 to 30% of our library school graduates over the past ten years have gone to the States, to the Middle East, all over. We have to bring them back.

Reappraisal goes with Reaccreditation. Our birth rate is such that we are going to be a country that relies increasingly on immigration just to keep the population stable, let alone grow it. Reaccreditation (the word is kind of a stretch) essentially means that in the past we have been fairly stingy accrediting librarians from countries outside North America. We are looking at reaccrediting librarians from Asia and the Middle East, for example.

Rejuvenation. Essentially how we breathe life into those who have ten years or so left until they retire to obtain what we need from them in terms of professional development and the management of knowledge transfer. You have this big batch of folks moving out, but are we appropriately mentoring and developing those that are coming in as this change quickly overtakes us? We are not looking only at the retirement of librarians in many libraries; support staff has a similar demographic look and feel and is aging pretty quickly as well.

If every library school graduate in Canada stayed in the profession, did not leave the country or stray from the traditional library—which we know never happens, but if they did not become information specialists, knowledge managers, Web designers, and the like, outside traditional libraries—if this mythical world where they all worked in a traditional box prevailed—we would barely meet 40% of the positions that will be opening up in Canada. Which, as I said, takes us to restructuring.

ATG: Restructuring is going to be driven by lack of people to do the jobs more than anything else, more than by budget cuts?

EI: Yes, I think so. Restructuring might mean we still have lots of people, but they will be a much different mix. What today is a professional activity may migrate to a different level of staff, to a para-professional of some kind. We already have seen that in spades over the years in our technical services, but this could accelerate. A lot of libraries still have a high percentage of technical services people who hold an M.L.S. I think there is going to be a

ATG: What book is on your bedside table now?

VZ: Daniil Granin, Vechera c Peroni Vellkim (Evenings with Peter the Great). <http://www.against-the-grain.com>