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Every journey begins with the first step

Beginning on a happy note

I was born into an ordinary family but everything I am I owe to my parents, who may be "ordinary" but are the best in the world. When I was four my mother sent me to dance school. As a soloist in the "Veterok" dancing troupe I took part in the "Veselye Notki" (Happy Notes) national TV show. Imagine what an experience for a young girl from Rostov-on-Don! Dancing freed me from the fear of public performance.

My favorite book as a preschooler was *Amusing Physics* by Perel'man. My mother and I used to read it together and then we would replicate "lab" experiments and construct "telephones" using matches and thread. My father taught me how to play chess. I vividly remember sneaking into the Peterhof palace with my father, through a window — the museum was about to close and it was our last day of vacation.

1993 was a key year for me. I received a "master of sports" certificate in rhythmic gymnastics, graduated from high school — with a "Gold Medal," and enrolled in the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics at the Rostov State University.

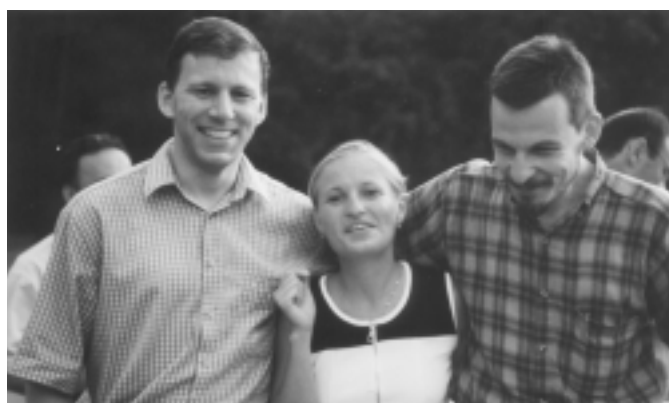
Computermania

When I was a first-year student my mother bought me a computer and I soon became obsessed with programming. Some of the programs I wrote won awards at student conferences. One in particular used a complicated algorithm to make life easier for postmen (or postwomen, for that matter). The idea was to reduce to a minimum the walking distance involved in mail delivery. Another program allowed for modeling equilibria in imperfect market competition settings using Cournot and Stackelberg strategies, as well as monopoly and cartel situations.

It was at the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics that I met Professor Sergey Veniaminovich Zhak, my academic adviser. The scope of Prof. Zhak's interests is truly enormous — from poetry, through philosophy of science, to mechanics. Together, we tried to generalize the Cournot and Stackelberg models of pricing in an oligopolistic market. We extended these models to the case of multiple firms and non-linear demand functions (which is what one commonly observes in the real world).

Competitions are not only about winning

It was only natural — given my interest in computers — that I learned about EERC through the Internet. People in my department tried to discourage me from applying. I was told that the chances of getting a research grant for someone who doesn't have much experience are next to zero. Still, I sent in an application in the hope of getting a "free" professional review of my work and to find out if it had any potential. German being my primary foreign language, I used computer software to render my proposal into English. Why spend time and effort if you don't believe you can win? Imagine my surprise when the first phrase of the response I received from EERC read as follows: "The expert committee noted the high academic quality of your project, etc." [ed: *Svetlana did not know that the response she got was also generated by a computer!*]. Despite such a promising beginning the letter contained a standard "revise and resub-



Danil Kleiman, Svetlana Nikolaeva and Alexis Belianin, EERC Summer School, Kyiv, July 2001

mit" requirement. A few weeks later I received an invitation to the summer school

Profiles

EERC was organizing in the second half of July in Kyiv. The Rostov-Kyiv train was delayed on the way, and the suffocating heat of over 35 degrees made me wonder whether going to Kyiv was the right thing for me to do. I was soon to get my answer.

The school introduced me to the real economics, economics that go beyond abstract models to empirical investigation and policy analysis. I was particularly impressed with the lectures and teaching style of Andrey Sarychev. What he did was teach us how to think as economists. This is probably more important than studying yet another model, no matter how elegant.

I would like to thank everybody who participated in organizing and running the School. There was a lot for me to take home on the train back to Rostov.