

A Soviet-Era Presenter Fulfills My Nov. 7 Dream

By [Cristina Giuliano](#)

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The first time I saw a Soviet parade was at the age of eight.

To be honest, it was not a parade but a funeral. For Leonid Brezhnev.

Watching a live television report from Moscow was not a local tradition in Milan, Italy, where I grew up. But my school teacher, “il maestro Miceli,” was a communist and he switched on the funeral coverage for the whole class to watch on that day in 1982.

The soldiers’ march across Red Square impressed me. It resembled a beautiful, harmonious dance. The Soviet military coats flashed with elegance. I tried to shed a tear because I knew that people were expected to weep at funerals. But I could not, even though I pinched myself on both legs.

When I moved to Moscow seven years ago to work as a reporter, I remembered the funeral march and promised myself that I would catch a Nov. 7 parade on Red Square. But nothing

seemed to work out.

All that changed a few weeks ago when Marina, a Russian friend, shoved an elbow into my ribs while we were at the Italian Embassy for a reception. “Look! It’s Anna Shatilova!” she said.

My face must have looked like a big question mark.

“Don’t you know who she is?” Marina said. “She was an anchorwoman for Soviet television. She was very good. She is very good. Even today she provides live on-air commentary for the parades!”

The magical word “parade” caught my attention.

I thought to myself, “I’ve got to know her.”

Anna Shatilova, 74, proved to be full of beans but a real lady, a “signora” in the Italian sense of the term. Mild-mannered but practical. Affable but firm. More like the best in Soviet traditions than the coarseness of New Russians. She has a way of dressing that would be tacky on anyone else, but she wears the clothes with a natural elegance.

Anna has always groomed her public image, thinking about how she dresses on Red Square.

“Usually I cannot sleep the night before because I am constantly checking the weather, thinking about how I should look,” she told me.

Anna’s outfits come from the hands of Slava Zaitsev, undoubtedly the best-known Soviet-Russian couturier. He calls her several days before an upcoming parade to say something like: “Last year you were wearing the red coat. This year I have a very nice one in white for you.”

Anna keeps all the clothes. It would be interesting to see her collection. Maybe in an exhibition.

Anna invited me to a rehearsal for the traditional Nov. 7 parade on the closed Red Square. This year’s parade commemorates the 72nd anniversary of a 1941 military parade at the start of World War II.

It was the first time in my life that I have walked on the Red Square and people flocked around me. OK, people were not stopping me but Anna Nikolayevna, who hooked her arm into mine and steered me through the crowd, saying, “Kristinochka, don’t be shy!”

Anna knew everybody on the square. She presented me to Vladimir Putin’s “diktor,” Yevgeny Khoroshevtsev, who announces the name of the Russian president before he strides out. She introduced me to so many people that I felt overwhelmed. I felt like Alice in Wonderland, because I have visited the Kremlin many times but never gotten a backstage pass. It was like following the Rabbit. I stood in the icy wind on Red Square and marveled at the most representative monument of Russia. It was not Lenin’s mausoleum, but Anna.

Anna spoke freely about Mikhail Gorbachev, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. “I was close to Gorbachev,” she told me. “I was even closer to his wife, Raisa Maximovna. She always asked me to share home remedies to restore her husband’s voice. I prescribed homeopathic

medicaments because Gorbachev, like me, had to speak a lot. And Mikhail Sergeyevich was very grateful.”

Anna offered equally warm words about President Putin, who decorated her with the Order of Honor in 2006. “I also have met Vladimir Putin,” she said. “When he bestowed on me my first state decoration, we dined together for three hours. It was a big event: the 70th anniversary of the Russian TV. We spoke for two hours. He gave me gifts and a bouquet of flowers.”

Turning to Prime Minister Medvedev, she said: “I know Dmitry Medvedev, too. He also awarded me at the Kremlin. It was two years ago. They all have always been very accessible. In contrast, I never had any meetings with Boris Yeltsin. Just a few days ago, I presented an event at the concert hall of the Christ the Savior Cathedral that was attended by Svetlana Medvedeva. There were so many children, and we had nice time.”

Anna Shatilova has been working for more than 35 years as a presenter at Red Square events. In Soviet times her main co-host was Igor Kirillov. Now it is Khoroshevtsev. But she is probably best remembered for her Soviet-era news reports on “Vremya” at 9 p.m. every night.

While she may no longer work as a news anchor, she is not water under the bridge. She still takes the occasional turn on Red Square. Her appearance and her voice are familiar to several generations of Russians. She is a charismatic déjà vu from the past.

Anna offered me with a charismatic déjà vu from my past. I remembered when I was eight years old and dreamed of watching a parade on Red Square.

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