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# Away From the Archives

## History professor Seth Bernstein shows his mischievous side

By Emily Erken

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Bernstein with his 2-year-old son in Kolomenskoye Park. **SETH BERNTEIN / PERSONAL ARCHIVE**

*Hailing from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Dr. Seth Bernstein moved to Moscow in 2013 after earning a Ph.D. in History from the University of Toronto. He is now an assistant professor at the Higher School of Economics. His first book, "Communist Upbringing under Stalin: Young Communists and War in a Socialist Society, 1929-1945," is set for publication in July.*

**I came on a post-doctoral fellowship at the Higher School of Economics in the WWII history department.** I stayed at that position for three years, and then I was hired permanently. I am open to moving to the U.S. if I get an academic job there. But I've been on the job market, had some campus interviews, and the conditions of jobs where I was interviewing would not be as good as they are here. And I wouldn't have the archives.

**I hadn't been so interested in Russian history before I came here.** [Kenyon College] set me up

with an internship at the Holocaust Museum in the Sakharov Center in Moscow. They had me transcribing interviews from victims of Stalinist repression into one long memoir. I became very interested. That's where it really started.

**My life is half in the university with colleagues who are often from abroad, and half with my partner and our family.** We have a toddler, a two-year-old. We don't spend that much time out: With a toddler it limits what you do. My outside time is mostly at work, [and] collegial bonding - at bars.

**We live in Kolomenskoye.** So, a very historic place. It's where Ivan the Terrible was born. So, we go for walks there sometimes in the parks, and I get to think that I'm Ivan. It's a neat place to live, and it's especially good with a child.

**Actually [my partner's] family basically lives in a dacha in Smolensk.** They live on a collective farm, though it's privatized now. There are about 100 or 200 people that work there. It's a village. It gives you an idea of what the collective farms were like. everyone takes such pride in their garden plots. It used to be a huge economic thing. Now, every time [my in-laws] come to visit us, they come with a huge sack of potatoes - like a sack of potatoes that weighs as much as my partner. And all of their neighbors have chickens and roosters, so they come with three dozen eggs.

**The Jewish Museum is one of the best in Russia.** This is in terms of being very modern, having a lot of interactive things, having input from real experts, not just a random collection, but with international scholars of Jewish history and Jewish culture, and local scholars, like Oleg Budnitsky. They also have this funny thing where you stand before a camera, and they will Photoshop you into a [picture of a] Jewish peasant from the 18th or 19th century.

**My favorite restaurant in Moscow is Jagannath, a vegetarian fast food chain.** The lunch deal changes everyday. Tomato soup with tofu or cheese, a salad with asparagus, and a pilaf rice type of dish [plov] with soft cheese. And then a very nice ginger drink. And they have places all around the city.

**My favorite place to hang out is the archives.** I worked in the archive in Petrozavodsk, in Karelia. The archive is right by the secret police (FSB) building, there's a big statue of [former Soviet leader and KGB boss Yuri] Andropov. And everyone from the archive goes to the canteen in the FSB building. That's where the good food is. Though you have to eat it with a bunch of FSB officers.

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