

APPLES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

By Molly Rivkin

One of my students came by my house at 8:30 Tuesday morning; she waited outside my door and called my name a few times. I let her in. She was carrying a bucket and wearing a matching gold sweat suit. She is in the 9th form, has long blond hair, is extremely studious, and from what I can tell is a bit of a perfectionist. When I try to chat with her in Ukrainian she corrects almost every word I say, and I can see her cringe when I mispronounce

chill which cannot be shaken off even on sunny days. This was an unusual school day because we were taking a field trip to an orchard on the other side of the village to gather apples. As usual, no one explained the situation to me, and with almost no information, I agreed to go.

We walked a mile and a half on dirt roads, dodging cow patties and the deepest ruts. Other students joined us, saying hello to me in English, and then chatting at each other in a mix of quick

him. I had been taught not to climb fruit trees, always use a ladder. Remembering I had no idea how things work in Ukraine, I bit my tongue. A sweet, round faced girl, took my hand and guided me away from the base of the tree. At his teacher's command, the boy started jumping up and down wildly on a sturdy branch, and apples rained down around us with soft thuds. Surprise must have shown on my face because the group of girls encircling me giggled and pointed at other trees. Through the orchard boys were jumping and climbing trees, shaking the apples to the ground. The tree had dropped its branch and a boy swooped in. We quickly used the bucket at the base of the tree picking up apples and putting them into our buckets.

By and by, the local boys would come around picking up the buckets and taking them to the truck and trailer nearby. A few minutes later they would return from the truck with empty buckets in hand. We went on like this from tree to tree. Eventually, the boys stopped coming around to pick up the buckets, instead sitting in the shade of a tree, so we carried our own buckets. Every now and then we would rest, sitting on our buckets, eating apples, and chatting. We threw apples back and forth, and even tried to play baseball. You'll know if you've ever tried to hit an apple with a stick, apples explode.

I tried to gather more information about what we were doing. The apples were rather small in size, and quite bruised from falling to the ground. The English teacher explained in a mix of Ukrainian and English that the apples would go to a juice factory. We were working in the orchard for a fundraiser, and to celebrate some sort of harvest holiday.

As the day went on I noticed not a single girl climbed into trees to shake

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The author (second from the right) with students after apple picking.

a word. She hates, really hates, hearing her language butchered so badly. It was especially hard when I first met her, but now she's relaxing a little more. Perhaps I'm the first foreigner she's heard trying to learn Ukrainian.

It was a blue-bird day, sun brightening every shade of green, but deceptively so, because September has brought a

Ukrainian and Russian. When we reached the orchard most of the school was assembled there, teachers and all. I tagged along with the 10th form class curious how we would go about apple picking.

A skinny brown haired fifteen-year-old boy, with whom I had spent the summer playing soccer, started to shimmy up one of the apple trees. I almost scolded

the apples down, and few boys were bent over buckets collecting apples. I also noticed were boys dumping the buckets into the trucks. Not liking how gendered the roles were, I cautiously pulled myself into a nearby tree. I spent a large portion of my childhood shimmying up trees, and wanted to put my expertise to use. I found a branch loaded with apples and started to jump around. Apples rained down. The boy who had been in the tree earlier excitedly yelled at his classmates, "LOOK! Molly is in the tree!" and as fast as lightning he was on a nearby branch also jumping.

With a sense of defiance warm in my chest, I marched over to the trucks and climbed up into the back. I stood next to a large 11th form boy with big ears and reached my hand out to grab the buckets being handed up. I dumped bucket after bucket into an already half full truck bed. The roundness of the apples made unsteady footing, so I tangled myself down until I felt secure. I stayed there for some time, starting to giggle, and repeatedly being asked if female teachers if lifting the buckets was too hard for me.

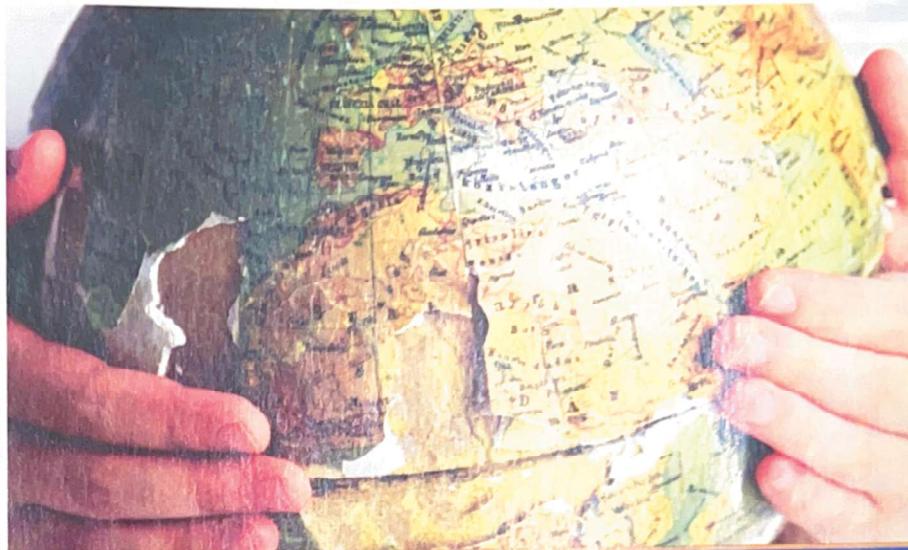
I think Ukrainian women were fooled: Dumping apples in to the truck was the easiest job I had all day. One boy quietly climbed into the truck and laid down in the apples, hidden from view. A teacher came by looking for him, and with big round eyes, he silently told me not to tell. I didn't know the situation or care, so I just kept on dumping bucket after bucket of apples on top of him until he was mostly covered. By and by he fell asleep.

Eventually, I resigned myself to my appointed gender role and went back to collecting apples from the ground. In the afternoon we were all dismissed to go home for the day. The next morning was school as usual, which, for me, is not the slightest bit usual yet.

Molly Rivkin (Ukraine 2012-2014) served as a youth development volunteer. She wrote and implemented a grant through the Elton John Aids Foundation for youth

HIV education, planned and implemented a dental hygiene seminar, and taught sports and healthy lifestyle classes. Molly has recently completed a Master's course in creative writing at the London Metropolitan University. She has contributed to the

anthology, *Roll: A Collection of Personal Narratives* (Telling Our Stories Press 2012), to the online newspaper, *News Bonners Ferry* (Winter 2013), the *Sandpoint Magazine* (Summer 2014), and to *Just Met: An Anthology of Stories and Poetry*.



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