



## **Beyond Fear**

I grew up in the U.S. during the Cold War. My parents were terrified when the Soviets launched Sputnik in 1959. My father, who was in show business, trembled in the shadows of Eugene McCarthy's communist witch-hunts. As a 10-year old, I thought the world would end with the Cuban Missile crisis in a holocaust of mushroom clouds. In school, we were required to chant, "Better Dead than Red!" We had "drop drills" where we huddled under our desks while the class monitor bravely closed the venetian blinds, ostensibly to protect us from a cyclone of nuclear fire. I was taught as a child to regard all Russians with fear and loathing.

As a teen, I was taken by an uncle to see the Royal Ballet several times. I loved the ballet! In 1965, my brother, a young Marine Corps Sergeant, was shipped off to fight communists in the jungles of Vietnam. On my 16th birthday, he sent me one month's combat pay. Wow! That was a lot of money! Just at that moment of sudden wealth, the Bolshoi Ballet came to town. I spent every penny of that money on the Bolshoi.

I will never forget their command performance of Swan Lake, danced in the outdoor amphitheater of the Hollywood Bowl. These dancers were on fire. They danced as if it were their final performance on the edge of the end of the world. I had never before beheld such amplitude of creative fire. They transported the audience into another dimension of beauty. They were utterly transcendent!

At the climax of Swan Lake, the hero ripped a wing off the evil black swan. At that precise downbeat, lightning split the skies and thunder boomed. And as the black swan writhed in his death throes, we were drenched in a sudden downpour. We all sat transfixed in this washing of the waters. All my hatred for Russians was cleansed by this miraculous confluence of creative fire and elemental nature. I thought, "I can never hate Russians again."

As wild gusts blew over the stage, I saw the American flag unfurl and stand straightly perpendicular to the stage. But the Soviet flag had been tied down by petty stagehands. I wept for my country at that moment. How could we be so disrespectful of such divine beauty and genius?

A few months later, my high school held an assembly for spokesmen from our State Department. They continued the rant: Better Dead than Red. I was emboldened to ask a question: "Isn't it possible that cultural exchange can ease the tensions between our two countries?" The spokesman sneered at me: of course not; how naive of you!

Myriad cultural exchanges occurred, nevertheless. They brought us Tchaikovsky; we brought them jazz and improvisation. Finally, the Berlin Wall fell without a drop of blood being shed. The human spirit of freedom brought it down; wild, irrepressible freedom and shared goodwill.

So, today I say to the world: May irrepressible freedom and creative fire prevail! May we share these gifts with one another and so, bring peace to the world.

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