

HE SAID

"I was born green. I was green when I was three years old. My first word was "pretty"—my mother said it was because I saw a butterfly. That's a good way to begin a life, isn't it?"

Ted Turner

Outbursts

By Jim Brenneman



Natalia Mount: a woman for all seasons

From former communist Bulgaria to managing exciting Redhouse

This is the first of two columns on Natalia Mount, the Redhouse and her life under Communism

At fifteen-years-old Natalia Mount got her first view of New York City's dazzling skyline. It was quite a sight for a girl who had spent most of her young life under Communism in Bulgaria.

"I fell in love with America then and it has been a continuing romance ever since," she said.

Today, at 31, she has a full and exciting life as managing director at Redhouse in Armory Square.

An only child, Natalia has always been surrounded by stimulating people. Both of her parents were journalists and authors and her father was a magazine publisher. Their life styles brought them into contact with the leading people of Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria.

"Of course it was living under Communism and all the restrictions that implied," she said. "But, then, in 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. We were all free. It was wonderful."

She came to Redhouse after an impressive career in arts management in New York City. It was a time of great stress at the young theatre that specializes in theatre, film, music and art. It had a big staff.

An observer noted: "There just seemed to be too many chiefs and no Indians. They were doing too many things. They were going in too many directions."

Natalia was hired to help reorganize the place.

"They needed new blood. Someone to come in and shake things up," she said. She was the shaker.

"It wasn't a pleasant time for anyone," she said.

Many staff and theatre



Richard Long

The long view

people were let go. They are now down to two paid persons. Natalia is the managing director and Laura Austin, actress, is the artistic director. There are two volunteers.

Austin, who is the artistic director, is the wife of Dr. Scott Allyn of Skaneateles, the founder of Redhouse.

Austin has recently appeared in "Lovesong" at Redhouse, a romantic comedy that has received good reviews.

Mount has always set high goals for herself.

"When I first came to America I wanted to be an FBI agent," she said.

"I bet you saw too many American spy movies," I said.

"Yes," she said, "that was part of it." We both laughed.

But she did choose the right direction to be an agent. She wanted to be a lawyer. During her college days she took pre-law courses at John Jay College. And, she worked part time in a legal office that specialized in appeals cases.

"But," she said, "after a discussion with my mother we realized it cost too much money to go to law school."

But this didn't discourage the ambitious Mount who speaks four languages: French, Russian, Bulgarian and English.

She and her husband, who is from Liverpool, England, had an interest in art. And her college experience had given her some practical interest in the business world.

These interests led her into

the vibrant world of New York City art.

"My husband and I would go to art shows in New York all the time. I started to sense there was the business of art," she said.

Natalia was one of the founders and director of the Next Art Gallery, a commercial gallery in the SoHo section of New York City, south of Greenwich Village.

"This organization encourages the development of traditional and experimental art forms," she said.

She also co-founded and directed FLUX, a non-profit arts organization that provides a forum for underprivileged and underexposed multi-cultural communities in New York City. She became a professor of Arts Administration at Metropolitan College of New York. She also worked at the P.S.I. Contemporary Art Center, an affiliate of the Museum of Modern Art, the country's oldest and second largest non-profit arts center devoted to contemporary art.

Her extensive experience in the management of art programs in New York made her an excellent candidate for the job at Redhouse.

Art, film, theatre and music are what Redhouse specializes in.

"I feel very comfortable here. It is a very challenging experience," she said.

(Next week: Natalia talks about her life under Communism and the contrast between the cultural life in Bulgaria and the United States)

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City scuffle

It's not over 'til when?

Remember? Two weeks ago, we're talking, although in the unrelenting drone of the Democrat's presidential primary chase it seems like two lifetimes ago. In the wake of the Indiana and North Carolina primaries the New York Daily News front page blared "Dem bosses admit game is up for Hil and now IT'S HIS PARTY." The New York Times, characteristically more subtle, suggested, "For Clinton, Options Seem to Dwindle," just above the front page fold. Other papers throughout New York State reflected loyalty to the relocated homegirl, focusing on Hillary's vow to stay in the race despite mounting pressure from party leaders to submit to then perceived insurmountable odds and ring the bell for party unity.

In Albany, the Times Union avoided subliminal coverage, running a lead editorial that read almost like straight reportage, observing what a difficult job Democrats faced, rallying behind one candidate while trying not to alienate the large segment of the party which passionately backed the other. Further north, the Press-Republican, "the hometown newspaper of Clinton, Essex and Franklin Counties," modestly bannered Clinton's vow to continue at the top of the front page, but almost buried the profile of her chances near the back of the second section of the Plattsburgh-based daily with roots tracing back to the first decade of the 19th Century. Her campaign chest had been drained, the profile noted, and her top advisors were hard-pressed to come up with a way to win.

We're not upstate

While the search for out of town newspapers in downtown Syracuse may not be fruitful for a 6 a.m. starting point, the New York Times and Daily News are displayed prominently on the rack next to the Press-Republican at Stewart's in Port Henry, where the laid back bustle has been holding sway since 4:30, providing coffee and a daybreak chat for folks heading out to fish or back to chores providing reassuring ritual in a time when the challenge to maintain economic opportunity for villages in the Adirondack Park shows in empty storefronts in similar proportions to those in the Rust Belt urban center upstate.

"We're not upstate," they'll tell you in Stewart's, the region's coffee and convenience chain, where free ice cream cones are advertised for moms on Mother's Day, single scoop, and samplers of pound cake on toothpicks offer a little extra for the morning's first cup. "We're not like the rural areas around Syracuse and Rochester. We're really a different culture. We're mountain." The core of that culture, located in the unique division, almost equally, of state protected wilderness and stalwart human activity, is told in the story of Port Henry's development.

Michigan's impact crucial

Incorporated in 1869, Port Henry sits on the edge of Lake Champlain, on the site of an 18th Century mill, which burned during the Revolutionary War, but, in the just plain stubborn tradition of local folks dealing with the vagaries of nature, was rebuilt. The town's major intersection, Main and Broad Streets, also state routes 54 and 9N, has no traffic light, and signs alert motorists to yield to pedestrians at the crosswalk. Porches fronting on the lake usually include a set of binoculars to check out sightings of Champ, the resident monster, in whose honor an annual Monster Champ clean-up day is held. A plaque in the pocket Memorial Park {no skateboarding, closes at 10 p.m.} lists enough names to suggest that the entire population served, in some capacity, in WWI.

Discussions of the Democratic primary race in Stewart's that day tended more toward the celebratification of the candidates as opposed to their positions on issues. Which seems logical since both agree on feasible withdrawal of troops from Iraq; opposition to Bush's economic policies, especially huge tax cuts for rich people who don't need them; support for abortion rights; and providing health insurance for people who don't have it. But there was general agreement on the primacy of impact of Michigans. That's with an s, and not the controversial primary votes from the Great Lakes state. Michigans are the pride of Essex County, competing secret recipes for a chili dog without the beans, providing an intense controversy raging between Port Henry and Elizabethtown as to whether the real deal is sweet or hot.

Characteristic of the culture, however, don't look for Michigans in Essex County after 9 p.m.

Walt Shepperd