

TRANS-SIBERIA

by Nancy Friedlander

From Anchorage across the sea
To Sakhalin Island and by train
To the town of Kohlmosk and back
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Embroidered doilies, plates of borscht,
Goblets of vodka, bread on a rack,
Mushroom soup, piles of cabbage
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Next Aeroflot to Vladivostok
Our purchases in a bright red sack
There on the train we climbed
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Our compartment was a thing of beauty
Two lower berths with amber roses
Mahogany table with brass in a crack
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Next on to industrial Khabarovsk
Mongol faces, yellow cranberries
To cook with sugar to put in tea
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

On the train hot garlic soup
With a large dumpling floating
Under the stretched-out pancake lid
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Next on to Birobidian, capital
Of the Jewish Autonomous Region
Where Stalin shipped the many Jews
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Then a whole day on the train
Running alongside the famous trakt
The only muddy route to the East
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Sunlight drifting through the birches
Small wooden villages along the way
Shutters blue, some green, white trim
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

The next day a stop at Ulan Ude
Bare brown plain with golden temple
White stupas, red prayer wheels
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Lunch on the train to Lake Baikal
Beet salad, shredded meat in aspic,
Stew and pickled cabbage
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Ah, Lake Baikal, invisible other side
One-fifth of the world's fresh water
Fed by 336 rivers but only one outlet
The river Angara where we slept

The next morning arrival in Irkutsk
Hydrofoil ride on Lake Baikal
Evening circus, then again the train
Clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Now the university town of Novosibirsk
Market Day with red chili peppers, grapes,
Onions, cornets of black sunflower seeds,
Thwacking meat cleavers, hunks of pigs

The afternoon at Akademgorodok
University, mineral museum, then
A look at a mammoth with curving tusks
An evening concert with a balalaika.

Nights on the train, searchlights in the sky
Long stockades with guard towers
And barbed wire in between
Reminders of dreaded prison camps

A last day on the train through forests
Before arriving in Moscow to see
The Armory, Red Square, St. Basil Cathedral
No more clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack

Some trips are just ordinary voyages
But this one I'll always remember
Especially when I hear that metallic sound
Of clickaty-clack, clickaty-clack