

= Samantha Smith =

Samantha Reed Smith (June 29 , 1972 ? August 25 , 1985) was an American schoolgirl , peace activist and child actress from Manchester , Maine , who became famous in the Cold War era United States and Soviet Union . In 1982 , Smith wrote a letter to the newly appointed CPSU General Secretary Yuri Andropov , and received a personal reply which included a personal invitation to visit the Soviet Union , which she accepted .

Smith attracted extensive media attention in both countries as a " Goodwill Ambassador " , and became known as " America 's Youngest Ambassador " participating in peacemaking activities in Japan . She wrote a book about her visit to the Soviet Union and co @-@ starred in the television series Lime Street , before her death at the age of 13 in the Bar Harbor Airlines Flight 1808 plane crash .

= = Historical context = =

When Yuri Andropov succeeded Leonid Brezhnev as leader of the Soviet Union in November 1982 , the mainstream Western newspapers and magazines ran numerous front @-@ page photographs and articles about him . Most coverage was negative and tended to give a perception of a new threat to the stability of the Western world . Andropov had been the Soviet Ambassador to Hungary during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Chairman of the KGB from 1967 to 1982 ; during his tenure , he was known in the West for crushing the Prague Spring and the brutal suppression of dissidents , such as Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn . He began his tenure as Soviet leader by strengthening the powers of the KGB , and by suppressing dissidents . Andropov declared , " the struggle for human rights was a part of a wide @-@ ranging imperialist plot to undermine the foundation of the Soviet state . " Much international tension surrounded both Soviet and American efforts to develop weapons capable of being launched from satellites in orbit . Both governments had extensive research and development programs to develop such technology . However , both nations were coming under increasing pressure to disband the project . In America , president Ronald Reagan came under pressure from a lobby of U.S. scientists and arms experts , while in Russia the government issued a statement that read , " To prevent the militarization of space is one of the most urgent tasks facing mankind " .

During this period , large anti @-@ nuclear protests were taking place across Europe and North America , while the November 20 , 1983 , screening of ABC 's post @-@ nuclear war dramatization The Day After became one of the most anticipated media events of the decade .

The two superpowers had by this point abandoned their strategy of détente and in response to the Soviet deployment of SS @-@ 20s , Reagan moved to deploy cruise and Pershing II missiles to Europe . The Soviet Union 's involvement in a war in Afghanistan was in its third year , a matter which was also contributing to international tension . In this atmosphere , on November 22 , 1982 , Time magazine published an issue with Andropov on the cover . When Smith viewed the edition , she asked her mother , " If people are so afraid of him , why doesn 't someone write a letter asking whether he wants to have a war or not ? " . Her mother replied , " Why don 't you ? " .

= = Life = =

Smith was born on June 29 , 1972 , in the small town of Houlton , Maine , on the Canada ? United States border , to Jane Reed and Arthur Smith . At the age of five , she wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth II in order to express her admiration to the monarch . When Smith had finished second grade in the spring of 1980 , the family settled in Manchester , Maine , where she attended Manchester Elementary School . Her father served as an instructor at Ricker College in Houlton before teaching literature and writing at the University of Maine at Augusta while her mother worked as a social worker with the Maine Department of Human Services .

In November 1982 , when Smith was 10 years old , she wrote to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov , seeking to understand why the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States were so

tense :

Dear Mr. Andropov ,

My name is Samantha Smith . I am ten years old . Congratulations on your new job . I have been worrying about Russia and the United States getting into a nuclear war . Are you going to vote to have a war or not ? If you aren 't please tell me how you are going to help to not have a war . This question you do not have to answer , but I would like to know why you want to conquer the world or at least our country . God made the world for us to live together in peace and not to fight .

Sincerely ,

Samantha Smith

Her letter was published in the Soviet newspaper Pravda . Samantha was happy to discover that her letter had been published ; however , she had not received a reply . She then sent a letter to the Soviet Union 's Ambassador to the United States asking if Mr. Andropov intended to respond . On April 26 , 1983 , she received a response from Andropov :

Dear Samantha ,

I received your letter , which is like many others that have reached me recently from your country and from other countries around the world .

It seems to me ? I can tell by your letter ? that you are a courageous and honest girl , resembling Becky , the friend of Tom Sawyer in the famous book of your compatriot Mark Twain . This book is well known and loved in our country by all boys and girls .

You write that you are anxious about whether there will be a nuclear war between our two countries . And you ask are we doing anything so that war will not break out .

Your question is the most important of those that every thinking man can pose . I will reply to you seriously and honestly .

Yes , Samantha , we in the Soviet Union are trying to do everything so that there will not be war on Earth . This is what every Soviet man wants . This is what the great founder of our state , Vladimir Lenin , taught us .

Soviet people well know what a terrible thing war is . Forty @-@ two years ago , Nazi Germany , which strove for supremacy over the whole world , attacked our country , burned and destroyed many thousands of our towns and villages , killed millions of Soviet men , women and children .

In that war , which ended with our victory , we were in alliance with the United States : together we fought for the liberation of many people from the Nazi invaders . I hope that you know about this from your history lessons in school . And today we want very much to live in peace , to trade and cooperate with all our neighbors on this earth ? with those far away and those near by . And certainly with such a great country as the United States of America .

In America and in our country there are nuclear weapons ? terrible weapons that can kill millions of people in an instant . But we do not want them to be ever used . That 's precisely why the Soviet Union solemnly declared throughout the entire world that never ? never ? will it use nuclear weapons first against any country . In general we propose to discontinue further production of them and to proceed to the abolition of all the stockpiles on Earth .

It seems to me that this is a sufficient answer to your second question : ' Why do you want to wage war against the whole world or at least the United States ? ' We want nothing of the kind . No one in our country ? neither workers , peasants , writers nor doctors , neither grown @-@ ups nor children , nor members of the government ? want either a big or ' little ' war .

We want peace ? there is something that we are occupied with : growing wheat , building and inventing , writing books and flying into space . We want peace for ourselves and for all peoples of the planet . For our children and for you , Samantha .

I invite you , if your parents will let you , to come to our country , the best time being this summer . You will find out about our country , meet with your contemporaries , visit an international children 's camp ? Artek ? on the sea . And see for yourself : in the Soviet Union , everyone is for peace and friendship among peoples .

Thank you for your letter . I wish you all the best in your young life .

Y. Andropov

A media circus ensued , with Smith being interviewed by Ted Koppel and Johnny Carson , among

others , and with nightly reports by the major American networks . On July 7 , 1983 , she flew to Moscow with her parents , and spent two weeks as Andropov 's guest . During the trip she visited Moscow and Leningrad and spent time in Artek , the main Soviet pioneer camp , in the town of Gurzuf on the Crimean Peninsula . Smith wrote in her book that in Leningrad she and her parents were amazed by the friendliness of the people and by the presents many people made for them . Speaking at a Moscow press conference , she declared that the Russians were " just like us " . In Artek , Smith chose to stay with the Soviet children rather than accept the privileged accommodations offered to her . For ease of communication , teachers and children who spoke fluent English were chosen to stay in the building where she was lodged . Smith shared a dormitory with nine other girls , and spent her time there swimming , talking and learning Russian songs and dances . While there , she made many friends , including Natasha Kashirina from Leningrad , a fluent English speaker .

Andropov , however , was unable to meet with her during her visit , although they did speak by telephone . It was later discovered that Andropov had become seriously ill and had withdrawn from the public eye during this time . Smith also received a phone call from Russian cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova , the first woman to orbit the Earth . However , not realizing with whom she was speaking , Samantha mistakenly hung up after only a brief conversation . Media followed her every step ? photographs and articles about her were published by the main Soviet newspapers and magazines throughout her trip and after it . Smith became widely known to Soviet citizens and was well regarded by many of them . In the United States , the event drew suspicion and some regarded it as an " American @-@ style public relations stunt " .

Smith 's return to the U.S. on July 22 , 1983 , was celebrated by the people of Maine with roses , a red carpet , and a limousine and her popularity continued to grow in her native country . Some critics at the time remained skeptical , believing Smith was unwittingly serving as an instrument of Soviet propaganda . In December 1983 , continuing in her role as " America 's Youngest Ambassador " , she was invited to Japan , where she met with the Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone and attended the Children 's International Symposium in Kobe . In her speech at the symposium , she suggested that Soviet and American leaders exchange granddaughters for two weeks every year , arguing that a president " wouldn 't want to send a bomb to a country his granddaughter would be visiting " . Her trip inspired other exchanges of child goodwill ambassadors , including a visit by the eleven @-@ year @-@ old Soviet child Katya Lycheva to the United States . Later , Smith wrote a book called Journey to the Soviet Union whose cover shows her at Artek , her favorite part of the Soviet trip .

Smith pursued her role as a media celebrity when in 1984 , she hosted a children 's special for the Disney Channel entitled Samantha Smith Goes To Washington ... Campaign ' 84 . The show covered politics , where Smith interviewed several candidates for the 1984 presidential election , including George McGovern and Jesse Jackson . That same year she guest starred in Charles in Charge as Kim , alongside another celebrity guest star , Julianne McNamara . Her fame resulted in Smith becoming the subject of stalker Robert John Bardo , the man who would later go on to stalk and ultimately murder My Sister Sam actress Rebecca Schaeffer . Bardo traveled to Maine in an attempt to meet Smith , but was stopped by police and returned home .

In 1985 she co @-@ starred with Robert Wagner in a television series called Lime Street .

= = Death = =

On August 25 , 1985 , Smith and her father were returning home aboard Bar Harbor Airlines Flight 1808 after filming a segment for Lime Street . While attempting to land at Lewiston @-@ Auburn Regional Airport in Auburn , Maine , the Beechcraft 99 commuter plane struck some trees 4 @,@ 007 feet (1 @,@ 221 m) short of the runway and crashed , killing all six passengers and two crew on board . Much speculation regarding the cause of the accident circulated afterwards . Accusations of foul play circulated widely in the Soviet Union . An investigation was undertaken in the United States and the official report ? which did not show evidence of foul play ? was made public . As stated in the report , the accident occurred at about 22 : 05 EDT , the ground impact point located one mile (1 @.@ 6 km) south @-@ west of the airport , at 44 ° 02 ' 22 " N 70 ° 17 ' 30 " W. The

report goes on to say , " The relatively steep flight path angle and the attitude (the orientation of the aircraft relative to the horizon , direction of motion etc .) and speed of the airplane at ground impact precluded the occupants from surviving the accident . " The main point of the report was that it was a rainy night , the pilots were inexperienced , and an accidental , but not uncommon and not usually critical , ground radar failure occurred .

Samantha Smith was mourned by about 1 @, @ 000 people at her funeral in Augusta , Maine , and was eulogized in Moscow as a champion of peace . Attendees included Robert Wagner and Vladimir Kulagin of the Soviet Embassy in Washington , who read a personal message of condolence from Mikhail Gorbachev .

" Everyone in the Soviet Union who has known Samantha Smith will forever remember the image of the American girl who , like millions of Soviet young men and women , dreamt about peace , and about friendship between the peoples of the United States and the Soviet Union " .

President Ronald Reagan sent his condolences to Smith 's mother , in writing ,

" Perhaps you can take some measure of comfort in the knowledge that millions of Americans , indeed millions of people , share the burdens of your grief . They also will cherish and remember Samantha , her smile , her idealism and unaffected sweetness of spirit . "

The remains of Smith and her father were cremated , and buried side by side in Estabrook Cemetery , Aroostook County , near Houlton where Smith was born .

= = Legacy = =

Smith 's contributions have been honored with a number of tributes by Russians and by the people of her home state of Maine . A monument to her was built in Moscow ; " Samantha Smith Alley " in the Artek Young Pioneer camp was named after her in 1986 . The monument built to Smith was stolen by metal thieves in 2003 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 . In 2003 , Voronezh retiree Valentin Vaulin built a monument to her without any support from the government . The Soviet Union issued a commemorative stamp with her likeness . In 1986 , when Soviet astronomer Lyudmila Chernykh discovered asteroid 3147 , she named it 3147 Samantha . The Danish composer Per Nørgård wrote his 1985 viola concerto " Remembering Child " in memory of Smith . A diamond found in Siberia , a mountain in the former Soviet Union , a cultivar of tulips and of dahlias , and an ocean vessel have been named in Smith 's honor . In Maine , the first Monday in June of each year is officially designated as Samantha Smith Day by state law . There is a bronze statue of Smith near the Maine State Museum in Augusta , which portrays Smith releasing a dove with a bear cub resting at her feet . The bear cub represents both Maine and Russia . Elementary schools in Sammamish , Washington , and in Jamaica , Queens , New York City , have been named after Samantha . In October 1985 , Smith 's mother founded The Samantha Smith Foundation , which fostered student exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union (and , after December 1991 , the ex @-@ Soviet successor states) until it became dormant in the mid @-@ 1990s . The Foundation was formally dissolved in 2014 after two decades of dormancy .

A 1987 episode of the U.S. sitcom The Golden Girls entitled " Letter to Gorbachev " draws inspiration from Smith 's story . In addition , the 1987 film Superman IV : The Quest for Peace included a scene where a boy writes Superman a letter to control the nuclear arms race ; according to Christopher Reeve , this scene was also inspired by Smith 's story .

In the mid @-@ 1980s , after Smith 's death , a script was written for a television movie titled The Samantha Smith Story with Robert Wagner as producer . Columbia Pictures Television and R.J. Wagner Productions were reported to have agreed to produce the film for NBC , with Soviet company Sovin Film interested in co @-@ producing it . Ultimately , Columbia Pictures Television decided not to film it due to lack of interest from any network .

In 2008 , Smith posthumously received the Peace Abbey Courage of Conscience Award for " helping to bring about better understanding between the peoples of the [USA and the USSR] , and as a result , reduce the tension between the superpowers that were poised to engage in nuclear war " . The Peace Abbey has also proposed The Peace Literature Project in Honor of Samantha Smith " to educate students about peace and promote peace literature for school @-@ age children in 50

selected pilot schools across the United States "

Elliott Holt 's 2013 novel *You Are One of Them* , uses the story of Samantha Smith as inspiration for a fictional character , Jennifer Jones . The book , characterized as literary fiction , was well received by critics for both literary style and page @-@ turning intrigue .

On the 30th anniversary of the plane crash in 2015 , the Maine State Museum opened a new exhibit of materials related to Samantha , including photographs of her time at the Artek camp , traditional Russian clothing she was given , and an issue of *Soviet Life* magazine with her on the cover .