

Miller Boyd

Stephen Bouser learned Russian while attending Army Language School in 1960, not knowing that over 30 years later he would be working to develop independent newspapers in Russia.

After becoming fluent in Russian, Bouser was stationed in Sinop, Turkey. In Turkey, Americans were intercepting USSR broadcasts and radio transmissions.

“After a year I was merged as someone fluent in Russian and spent another year and half of my enlistment at this top secret army security agency listening post over on the northern black sea coast of Turkey,” said Bouser.

Bouser went to college after spending three years with the ASA and majored in English. Over the next 30 years, Bouser worked for different newspapers until he became the editor at the Salisbury Post. While editor, he began writing an editorial about the need for Americans to go to Russia in order to steer them in a democratic direction after the dissolution of the USSR. Bouser soon began refreshing his Russian language skills.

“After getting my language up to speed, there happened to be a couple of very nice Russian guys that happened to be visiting Salisbury, and I had them over to our house and they ended up spending a week staying with us and talking a lot of Russian,” said Bouser. “They went home, and a few weeks later I get this invitation inviting me to come over. I had never even been to Russia.”

After returning to Salisbury, Bouser began writing articles about his experiences in Russia which caught the attention of the Center for Foreign Journalists.

“Next thing I know, I get an envelope in the mail from The Center for Foreign Journalists from Washington saying that they heard about this and they want me to go over and spend the whole summer, 8 weeks studying russian newspapers, visiting them and writing a report,” Bouser said.

Bouser fell in love with the country during his time spent traveling to the Golden Ring, an area outside of Moscow. His report developed into an opportunity to live in Russia for a year, granted by the U.S. Agency for International Development, as a professional-in-residence at the Russian-American Press Center, RAPIC. Bouser was hesitant to accept the position, as he would have to leave his job as editor. The move would impact his wife and daughter.

“But, one day my wife Brenda said ‘Look, if you don’t do this thing I will never be able to live with you again,’” said Bouser.

They moved to Moscow, Russia, where Bouser continued to build relationships with editors and newspapers, researching what they needed to become an independent news source.

“What they’d been living under was just being paid by the government to be a mouthpiece for the government,” said Bouser. “So what they printed was not the truth that reporters went out and found, it was propaganda that the government ordered them to print.”

Bouser helped found the Professional Media Program while working for the USAID, but eventually left Russia to return to North Carolina with his family.