



This image depicts a famous photo which Emmanuel Evzerihin took in Stalingrad (Volgograd) during August, 1942.

What is this fountain? What are the children doing? Why is a crocodile part of the fountain? Does it tell a story largely unknown to English speakers?

The children, featured in this fountain, are dancing the Khorovod. The Khorovod is a type of common circle dance which Russian children loved to do before WWII.

The fountain itself, which was installed in Stalingrad during 1939, was also called Barmaley Fountain and was based-on a fairy-tale poem by Korney Chukovsky (1882-1969). It begins (in literal English translation) with these words:

*Once there lived
A Crocodile.
He walked on the streets,
Smoked cigars,
Spoke Turkish, -
Crocodile, Crocodile,
Crocodilovich!*

The tale goes on to tell us that the crocodile, while strolling down the streets of Petrograd (St Petersburg) swallows a police officer. (The officer gets rescued - un-chewed - by a brave young lad named Vanya.)

Other nonsensical things - including gibberish and talking animals which make children laugh ... and ... remember - are part of the story. Things like this:

*When the Crocodile swallows the Sun, darkness descends on the Earth;
All of nature - plus animals and people - began to suffer without the sun;*

The children decide to save the Earth by asking the Crocodile, whose name was Barmaley, to restore the Sun to its normal place.

How the tale came about in the first place is interesting in its own right. Maxim Gorky - the Soviet-era author - had asked Chukovsky to write a children's poem which he would include in a collection.

With that request in mind, Chukovsky had an opportunity to create a story while he was traveling by train to St Petersburg. Wishing to entertain his young son, who was ill, Chukovsky made-up a poem about a crocodile.

The child, mesmerized by the story, remembered the entire tale which he'd never heard before (because his Papa had just composed it during their train trip). Krokodil ("Crocodile") - one of Chukovsky's most-famous stories - was thereafter published in 1916.

After it was published, Chukovsky's story did not "sit well" with Bolshevik government officials - especially Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya - who believed that children should be taught socialist values on every level, to the exclusion of fantasy tales. The author disagreed and was appalled that anyone would think children could not have colorful, interesting stories as part of their childhood experiences.

No matter how hard he tried, and no matter who tried to help him, Chukovsky could not get "Crocodile" republished. At least ... not until after Stalin died in 1953.

Children, however, really loved Chukovsky's Crocodile story (even though it could no longer be published). And the people of Stalingrad - with that story in mind - installed a fountain of children dancing around a crocodile. It

is that fountain which was damaged when German planes carpet-bombed Stalingrad on the 23rd of August, 1942.

During the battle for Stalingrad, editors of Soviet papers wanted heroic pictures. They didn't want pictures of moving scenes unless those pictures also showed how firmly the Soviet people were responding to the German invasion.

So ... when Emmanuel Evzerihin put himself at risk, in the burning city, to take this now-famous picture of the Children's Fountain in Stalingrad - during August of 1942 - his editor was not happy. In October, of that year, he sent Evzerihin what can only be considered a reprimand:

For more than a month the heroic defenders of Stalingrad have bravely and stoically held off all attacks of the bestial Hitlerite forces. However, the photo agency Fotokhronika TASS has not received a single shot from a single photojournalist about the defense of the city itself.

By the way, a whole series of newspaper photographers, such as Comrades Tyomin and Troshkin [who were working for Pravda], have produced a series of impressive and historical photographs of Stalingrad itself. The photo agency is not at all pleased with this situation. We're interested in scenes of street battles, important people, residents of Stalingrad - defenders of their hometown, and other themes. (Quoted by David Shneer in *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust*, at page 120.)

In other words ... don't send us pictures of bombed-out fountains, even if they make a poignant statement.

There's one more thing to know about the famous fountain. Although it was initially repaired, after the war, it was dismantled in the 1950s. In 2013, a new fountain was installed in Volgograd. It, like the original, is based on Chukovsky's story and includes children dancing the Khorovod around a crocodile.

Known as the Barmaley Fountain, its opening - on August 23, 2013 - was even attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Located where the original was situated before the war - in front of the train station - the fountain helps people to remember the 40,000 residents of Stalingrad who died on August 23, 1942 - the same day the prior fountain was damaged.

Click on the image for a better view.

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See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Children-s-Fountain-Story-Behind-the-Iconic-Image)

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Questions 2 Ponder

What Makes a Photo Meaningful?

During WWII, newspaper editors wanted political-point-making photos, but one photographer had other ideas.

Emmanuel Evzerihin, working in Russia, thought it better to take pictures which resonated emotionally and personally. His iconic photo of "The Children's Fountain," remains famous.

Why do you think Emmanuel photographed "The Children's Fountain," during the Battle of Stalingrad?

What does the photograph communicate to you?

Emmanuel's editor wanted a different kind of picture:

We're interested in scenes of street battles, important people, residents of Stalingrad - defenders of their hometown, and other themes.

Would those types of editor-preferred pictures be more interesting to you - or - are pictures like “The Children's Fountain” more compelling to think about as you view scenes of war-torn towns? Explain your answer.

Do you think that political-point-making photos are driven by political agendas? Is there ever a place for political-agenda pictures? Explain your answer.

Why Do We Enjoy Fantasy-Based Stories?

Fantasy stories, with talking animals and made-up worlds, fascinate young and old alike. Barmaley, a talking-crocodile, once soothed a sick child traveling by train to St. Petersburg.

Mesmerized by the crocodile story, the child was able to recall the entire tale by the time he reached St. Petersburg. His father, Korney Chukovsky, had made it up during the trip to entertain his sick child.

When Chukovsky published his story (in poetic form) about the crocodile, and his fantastical adventures, other Russian children loved the tale, too. Soviet government officials, however, would not allow it to be republished for decades because they believed children should not hear fantasy stories.

Do you think that colorful stories, which feature talking animals, should be part of a person's childhood experiences? Why, or why not?

Did the Soviet government make a good or a bad decision by banning the Crocodile story? Explain your answer.

Why do children enjoy fantasy-based stories?

Do you think hearing or reading stories about talking animals hinders a child's education in any way? Explain your answer.

Can We Defy Censorship by Actions If Not by Words?

People in Stalingrad installed a fountain, featuring a crocodile named Barmaley, even though the government had banned the much-loved story on which the crocodile was based.

When the people built “The Children's Fountain” - even though the story itself could not be republished - were they acting in defiance of the government's order? Explain your answer.

If erecting “The Children's Fountain” was an act of defiance, would you support (or not support) such an action (especially if you were a Stalingrad resident)? Explain your answer.

Can you think of other ways in which people can defy censorship by their actions, when the government does not permit criticism by written words

Media Stream



Children's Fountain - Story Behind the Iconic Image

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Children's Dance Fountain - Barmaley Fountain in Volgograd

Image of Barmaley Fountain—in Volgograd, Russia—by Andrey Bogdanov; online via Panoramio.

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