



*Like Kids Everywhere*  
**Samantha Smith**  
**Maine**

Samantha Smith was just a normal ten-year old-girl from Manchester, Maine. She liked to put off her homework, ride bikes, and have sleepovers with friends. But lying in bed at night, she had nightmares about nuclear war.

Stories she heard on television, and discussions in her fifth-grade classroom about nuclear war made Samantha nervous, and scared. It upset her that two countries could really start a war that could actually destroy the world, so that the children would never have a chance to grow up. Like most children she believed that people should learn to get along. She believed the United States and the USSR had to make peace, for the sake of kids all over the world.

One cold November afternoon in 1982, Samantha thought of what she could do. She picked up a pencil and began to write a letter to Yuri Andropov, the leader of the Soviet Union. She put stamps on the envelope, and asked her Dad to mail it on his way to work.

*My name is Samantha Smith. I am 10 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 it if you would. Why do you want to conquer the world or least our country? God made the world for us to share and take care of. Not to fight over or have one group of people own it all. Please let's do what he wanted and have everybody be happy too.*

Samantha Smith  
*P.S. Please write back.*

Months went by, but in April Samantha finally received a letter from the Soviet Embassy in Washington D.C. The letter was from Yuri Andropov. He called Samantha "a brave and honest girl," and praised her initiative. "We want peace," he wrote. "We have a lot to do: grow grain, build, invent, write books, and make space flights. We want peace for ourselves, and for all people of the planet, for our kids and for you." He added, "I invite you to come to our country and see for yourself. In the Soviet Union, everyone is for peace and friendship among peoples." He closed by saying, "The best time to come is in the summer."

Samantha accepted his invitation. When she traveled to the Soviet Union that summer, it attracted attention around the world. Journalists filmed, photographed, and wrote about her journey. Adults saw pictures of Samantha laughing in Moscow, swimming at a children's camp on the Black Sea, and riding bicycles in Leningrad. The Russian children in the photos with Samantha didn't look like enemies, or like monsters; they just looked like kids everywhere.

During her two-week visit, Samantha made deep friendships with some of those children. None of them hated the United States, and no one wanted war. "Sometimes at night we talked about peace," she said when she was back home. "It seemed so strange to talk about war when we all got along so well together." She returned home with a single question, "Why can't grown-ups get along, like kids?"

Over time Samantha became a symbol of peace to both countries. Her high spirits, warm smile, and love for others were an inspiration to people around the world. She inspired hope for resolving conflicts, and a new beginning for the US and USSR.

In 1985 a new beginning seemed like an impossible dream. But Samantha's dream came true. That year, the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, and the President of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, signed a nuclear disarmament pledge.

Children were no longer haunted by nightmares of nuclear war. Kids in both countries can now grow up thinking of each other as friends. However, Samantha never experienced the future she longed for so desperately for all children. Tragically, a plane crash took the lives of Samantha and her father just before the nuclear disarmament agreement was signed. She was just 13 years old.

But as America's youngest ambassador of peace, Samantha's courageous spirit lives on. In honor of her, her mother created the Samantha Smith Foundation to facilitate cultural exchanges between American and Soviet citizens. In 1986 twenty of Samantha's classmates from Maine traveled to the Soviet Union. They visited the same children's camp on the Black Sea that Samantha had visited, and met some of the Soviet teens who had made friends with her. To this day, Samantha is remembered as a folk heroine in Russia. All fifth graders now read about her in a chapter of their history books that is dedicated to her life, and her dream of peace. And so the hope and courage she demonstrated is constantly reborn in the minds of children.

In 1993, the Samantha Smith Summit was launched by 160 fifth graders from 71 schools in Florida's Pinellas County, to discuss why people are hurting each other, and what can be done to stop it. As each student entered the auditorium, they paused, one by one, to read Samantha's letter to Yuri Andropov. More than 15 groups from around the world were represented at the Summit—Egyptians, Bulgarians, Iranians, African Americans, and Vietnamese students, among others. They came from all different economic backgrounds. Normally they would have felt they had little in common. But at the Summit, they put their differences aside and worked together.

They talked in small groups, brainstormed solutions, and presented their best ideas about how to make a more peaceful world. "Talk to your parents to let off steam." "Form neighborhood patrols." "Involve all people in solutions to community problems." "Assign people community duties so they learn to care about one another." "Help stand up for criminals so they can get jobs." "We can't ignore anyone!" Cheers broke out after each solution was read aloud. The kids clapped high fives, and smiled at their new friends all around the room, laughing at how easy it was to "think positive."

"We found out that we have more in common than we thought," ten-year-old Aubrey Angelillis said, speaking for the group. "We all want to stop violence and crime, and try to show that kids—not just adults—can make a difference in the world."

When the fifth graders left the auditorium that day, they were convinced that they had the power to make their communities better and safer. They believed that anyone, large or small—whether the president of a huge, powerful country, or a fifth grader who dared to ask a president some big questions—could create change.

A letter on the door of the school, signed "Samantha Smith" proved it.

*God made the world for us to live together in peace and not fight.*

**Samantha Smith**

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