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Richard Feynman, brilliant physicist and inspirational teacher, wasn't much for coats and ties. He lived a life that the adjective "bohemian" doesn't begin to cover, scripting percussion scores for avant-garde ballet troupes, musing over life's imponderables, and delighting and annoying his many friends with odd-duck questions--all the while teaching generations of students at CalTech.

Always adventurous, Feynman was also a careful planner, recounts his friend and fellow drummer Ralph Leighton in this affectionate memoir. When a chance remark happened to dislodge a long-dormant memory of a faraway Siberian land called Tannu-Tuva, Feynman and Leighton set about scheming to get there--a program that included learning the little-described Tuvan language, picking up the rudiments of throat singing, and reading the scattered, hard-to-find literature concerning a place that, in Feynman's fond view, was as close to paradise as the earth contained. It also involved corresponding with scholars in what was still the Soviet Union and wrangling with bureaucrats to secure the necessary papers--all for the sake of seeing a country that had to be interesting, Feynman insisted, just because its capital, Kyzyl, had such an odd spelling.