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## The personality of the children took over

Both the writer and the photographer of the sensitive and moving essay on the thalidomide babies that begins on page 46 had hesitations and qualms when they set out to do it. Alan Levy and Leonard McCombe still remembered their own reaction seven years ago when they read of the children born malformed because their mothers had taken what was supposed to be a harmless and effective tranquilizer.

Work on the story began over a year ago when free-lance writer Alan Levy originally suggested the subject to us.

He pointed out that now the thalidomide babies were facing a new ordeal—many of them just starting school and taking their first steps outside the home. He spent four weeks traveling in England, Germany, Sweden and the United States, visiting families and clinics, and talking with doctors. But before he talked to any of the children, he and Reporter Yvonne Chabrier saw a documentary movie in London, which tells the story of a thalidomide boy and his family. Yvonne remembers that when the film ended "Alan and I were both so shaken that we sat in silence, tears in our eyes. And afterward we wondered how we could handle ourselves when we actually saw the children."

They need not have worried. After they had spent a little time with Graham in his Sussex home, they found the boy so happily unself-conscious and so matter-of-fact about his handicap that they became as unaware of it as he. In Germany, Yvonne accompanied Herr Schulte-Hillen when he took his son Jan and a handicapped friend on a gliding expedition. She was dismayed at the reaction of the crowd. "There were Jan and his friend," says Yvonne, "and everyone stared at them, nudged each other and moved around to get a closer look. The kids didn't even know it. They just went on playing happily in the field, collecting a huge bouquet of flowers."

To Leonard McCombe fell the delicate task of photographing the children with their families. "I found myself most concerned," he recalls, "with the feelings of the parents. The children aren't really old enough yet to know what's happening and I kept putting myself in the parents' place. After all, my second son Michael is exactly that age, so I felt that I was in a 'but for the grace of God' situation. At the beginning I wasn't sure that I'd be able to take any pictures at all, and in fact the first half day I did hardly any shooting. But then I reacted just the way Alan and Yvonne did. The personality of the children took over. So did my admiration for the parents. My initial reaction was shock, which the reader must feel when he sees the pictures, but I realized I mustn't let the parents know. To me, the parents are heroes. And who can pity a hero?"



ALAN LEVY



YVONNE CHABRIER



LEONARD McCOMBE

George P. Hunt  
GEORGE P. HUNT,  
Managing Editor

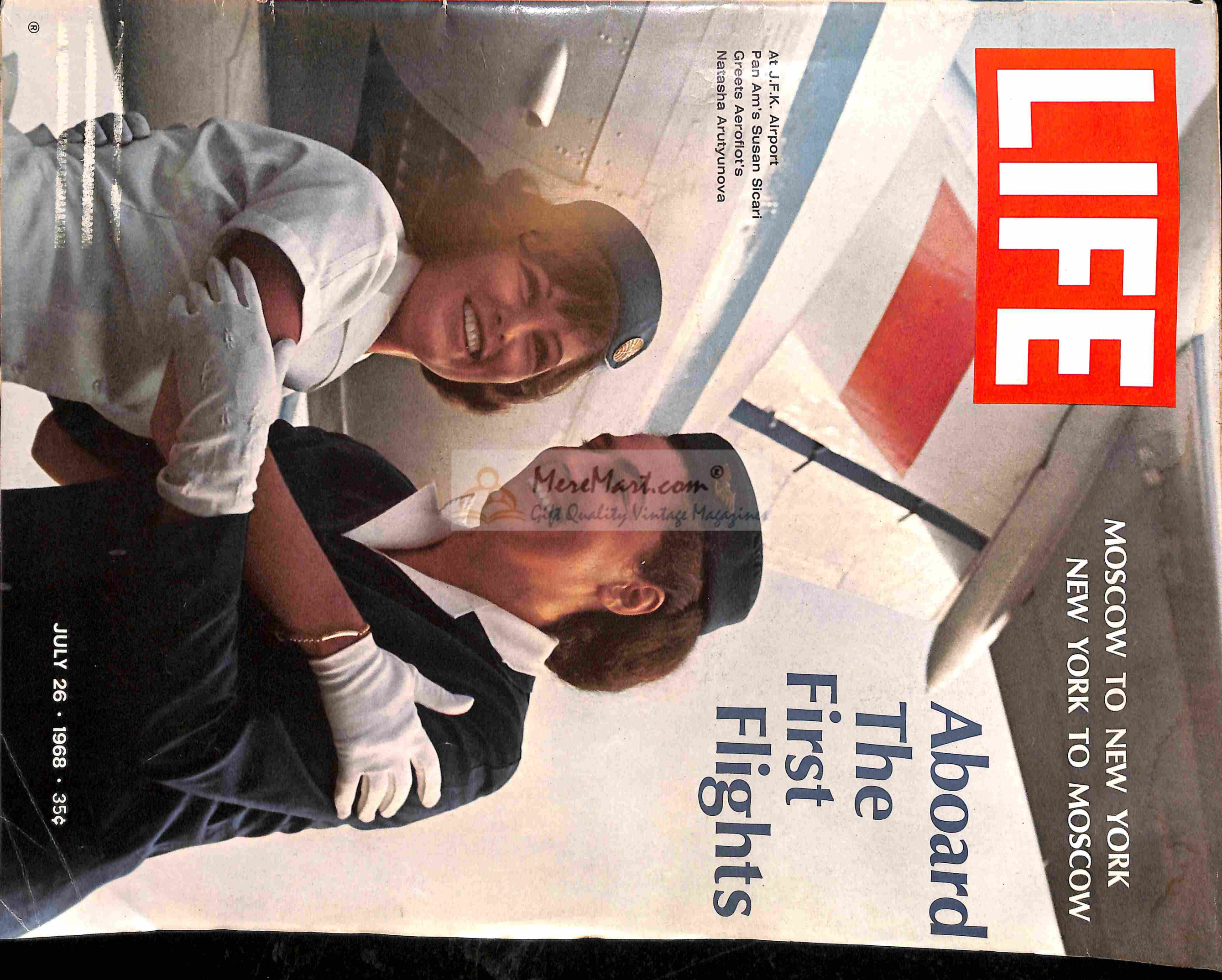


# LIFE

MOSCOW TO NEW YORK  
NEW YORK TO MOSCOW

## Aboard The First Flights

At J.F.K. Airport  
Pan Am's Susan Sicari  
Greets Aeroflot's  
Natasha Arutyunova



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