



Transcultural Experience to Russia



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May 13-14, 2017

Our first day, May 13th, began at 2:30pm in Chicago O'Hare Airport. This is where we met before beginning our two-week adventure. We flew from O'Hare international airport to London Heathrow, then from Heathrow to Moscow. We were very fortunate our flights were on time and we had no trouble traveling.

It was here at the Moscow airport we met our guide, translator, and soon-to-be friend, Nina. She greeted us with warm smiles and big hugs. She mentioned that we all looked tired, which was an understatement considering the amount of traveling we had just done. However, us being tired did not take away any of our excitement to finally be in Russia and beginning our transcultural experience. After meeting with Nina and brief introductions we went outside to wait for our bus. The bus that picked us up had so much room, this allowed for all of us to spread out (which we all appreciated).

The bus ride from Moscow to Vladimir was long and only built my excitement to finally be in Vladimir. The long bus ride was fun for many reasons. The main being: it allowed us girls to talk and get to know each other a little better, long car rides are always good for conversation! While on the bus ride I was also able to see a more rural area of Russia. It was very interesting to compare the differences and similarities between Russia and the United States. The houses along the way were very colorful, they were green, pink, and yellow, just to name a few. I do not think I have ever seen so many colorful houses in my life. Another interesting thing I noticed while on the bus ride was how many gas stations there were. There seemed to be a gas station every 90 feet on both sides of the highway. Last but definitely not least, while on the bus Nina also provided us with snacks. Seeing all the different Russian pastries, candies, and snacks was one of my favorite things on this trip. Like I said previously it was so interesting to compare the United States and Russia, to note the similarities and the differences.

Once we arrived at the hotel we began the check in process. The staff was so friendly and helpful and the check in process went quickly and smoothly. I was paired to room with Sarah, she was a wonderful roommate to have. We had a lot of fun throughout the trip. Our first night, however, was more about relaxing and getting some much-needed rest to prepare for the

days ahead of us. We needed a good night's rest to adjust to the time change, which is to be expected any time you travel!

The next morning, Day 2, May 14th, we woke up and got ready for our first official day in Vladimir, Russia and the adventures that entailed! This started with our very first breakfast at the Rus Hotel. Believe me when I say this: the food was amazing. The first breakfast I tried was a dish called Skobyanka. It is a chicken dish with mushrooms, onions, and a cream sauce. It was delicious, and I did not hear a single complaint from any of the girls during breakfast, ever! Between us all we tried about every breakfast item on the menu. I knew from then on breakfast was truly going to be the most important meal of the day.

After breakfast, the girls and I decided to go on a short walk since we had a little free time. We wanted to see Vladimir and see just what exactly the town was like and what was nearby. We were all giddy with excitement as we encountered countless cafes, restaurants, shops, a mall, and best of all a McDonald's! The town of Vladimir not only had a McDonald's but also a Burger King and a Papa John's. The interesting part about this was that these restaurant names are pronounced the exact same way as in the United States, but spelled using the Russian alphabet. After our very brief, self-lead excursion we headed back to the hotel to wait for Nina.

Nina and Olga met us at the hotel and walked with us to a restaurant called the Krendel. This is where we would have the majority of our lunches and dinners. The Krendel always served us so many courses and desserts. We all loved trying the different desserts. After lunch at Krendel we began our guided tour of Vladimir. To me, it is always fascinating that cities can have buildings, traditions, etc. that are over 1000 years old. That is something that we do not really have here in the United States. We walked a street in Vladimir that was the old "main street." It was refaced to look how it would have looked many years ago, it was like walking in the past.

There were so many historical buildings in Vladimir. The first one that we went into was called The Golden Gate. This building in its original state was designed to protect the city of Vladimir from invasions. Even though I am not a real history buff, it would be impossible to not be in awe of the historical and cultural significance of this structure. While in Golden Gate we

were able to see memorabilia from other wars that Russia participated in. These memorabilia included; uniforms, medals, weapons, and even pictures of highly regarded soldiers.

Our next stop on our tour of Vladimir was a water tower, it was the first water tower in the town. Now they use the water tower as museum. This museum was like stepping into the past. There were mannequins dressed up in old fashioned, traditional Russian clothes, there were antique pieces of furniture, old newspapers, and so much more. The mannequins were interesting because they allowed us to see what the Russian people had worn throughout the ages. At the very top of the water tower we were able to look around 360 degrees and had beautiful views of Vladimir and the land that the town overlooked. After the tower, we walked out into the park that was just outside, we continued to soak in the rich, long standing history of Vladimir. We were so blessed to have Nina as our translator and Olga as our historian. I was truly in awe of how much she knew about the city and how knowledgeable she was of the city's history. In, all our first two days were mostly about getting acclimated to the new time zone and learning about the long-standing history of the beautiful city we were going to become a part of.

May 19, 2017

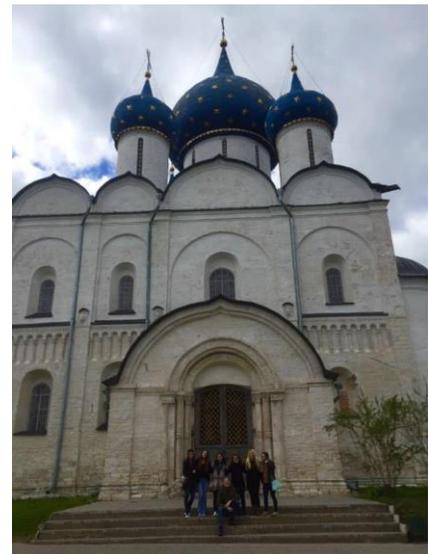
Today was the first day that was geared more towards the healthcare in Russia. Although it started off as an early morning, we were eager to see different opportunities that were provided in Russia. Our first stop of the day was Sheredar Foundation. Unsure of what to expect, we were impressed by the passion, care, and meticulous thought that was obviously seen in the facility through its appearance and employees. During our excursion, we were paired up with Anastasia – a member of the supervisory board – who thoroughly explained Sheredar Foundation’s goal while guiding us through the site. Sheredar focuses on rehabilitating children with oncological or hematological diseases from the ages 7 to 17. All of the children have been in remission for at least four years. The foundation’s rehabilitation focuses on the psychosocial aspect of the children and the family’s health. They are able to accomplish this goal by utilizing compassionate volunteers and providing the children with different activities in order to facilitate the development of creativity and self-expression. In addition, the cabins where the children were set up in were geared towards facilitating open communication between both the other children as well as volunteers. The programs works on building up children’s confidence and independence. Many of the children who come to the facility are physically disabled or still need medical treatment. In order to be inclusive to a wide range of children, the facility offers a cabin to provide medical treatment. In addition, Sheredar provides accommodations during activities for the children so that they are able to participate in activities that they may not have the opportunity to typically do. For instance, Sheredar has a ropes course that is accessible to children in wheelchairs. One of the most amazing attributes about the facility is that the participants of the camp do not have to pay. The program is free of charge. We were also brought to the cafeteria and were able to see the open set up. There we asked Anastasia any extra questions that we had. Such as how children and volunteers were able to register. Most of the time all applications are done online. In addition, for children they make their best efforts to accept children who have not yet participated in the program before accepting returning participants. I believe looking at this facility was extremely beneficial because it helped open our eyes to possibilities and opportunities that can be provided. After touring the facility we went to a master craft class. In the craft class we had a brief lesson on *Standing in front of a cabin in Camp Sheredar with Anastasia* traditional Russian folk art, focusing on dolls. After, we learned how to create a certain type of traditional rag doll using materials such as cloth, string, and

stuffing. One thing that Ljudmila – the person teaching our group – emphasized on was how important it was to stay positive and kind during the entire creating process, so that our feelings would transfer to the doll itself. The room we were in was filled with beautiful pieces created by amateur craftsmen that were active participants in the program. After completing our dolls we were able to tour the facility in its entirety. We were able to see a vast variety of works of art and history exemplifying the massive talent that the people had. It was very interesting! *With Ljudmila and the traditional Russian dolls we created.*

May 20, 2017



Today we spent a majority of the day with students from Vladimir Medical College (VMC). Some of the students came with a professor in order to drive us to the picnic site located in a forest. There was also a current nurse, an alum of the college, that acted as a translator for us and the students. The students were all extremely friendly and very open to talking to us even if there *Tug-of-war competition between students Posing with some of the students* was a communication barrier. To start off the day, we played volleyball. Although there were some players who were obviously more experienced than others, it was fun for everyone. Everyone had great sportsmanship and were extremely supportive of each other. After, we all went to eat the food prepared. The food included fruits, salads, breads, sweets, and the main dish Shashlik – a popular and delicious meat dish. For dessert they also presented us with Russian pancakes – what we would typically call a crepe in America – with honey. During the meal the professors made toasts and the students took the chance to get to know each other better, talking about random topics and differences in culture. We were able to see how talented the students were. They sang us songs and played the guitar for us. After filling our stomachs with good food we walked around the forest and took



many photos. We also played other games such as tug-of-war, charades, and some more volleyball. The experience was a great and fun one where we were able to make bonds while intertwining different cultures.

May 21, 2017

Russia is overflowing with beautiful architecture and design. Today we took a day trip to Suzdal and that sentiment was once again renewed. Suzdal is an ancient town rich with cathedrals. On this day trip we not only went with Brunette Olga and Nina but also Jumart and Blonde Olga. Blonde Olga gave us an in depth description of the history of Suzdal while Nina translated for us. She explained how you can always see two to three cathedrals no matter where you are standing in Suzdal. We viewed several sites including a monastery, a convent, and Suzdal Kremlin. We also listened to a folklore and overall just embraced the beauty of Suzdal. The streets were abundant with stores and craftwork including art such as embroidery. We walked through them briskly and surveyed the shops looking for items that called out to us. We also had the opportunity to do a small tasting of a traditional Russian drink where we tasted multiple flavors of said beverage. It was interesting to taste the wide variety of flavors available. This was a very interesting trip that allowed us to see more of Russia's beautiful architecture and helped us have a better understanding of some of Russia's history. *Standing in front of the beautiful Suzdal Kremlin*



May 22, 2017

We started off our day around 9 am when Jumart picked us up from our hotel to take us to Vladimir Medical College. The focus of our day was to observe the different classes and to meet the students and faculty. We met Nina at the entrance, and she took us to a Psychology class taught by Olga Timofeeva. The class had a practical exam concerning patient teaching about the use of respiratory devices such as inhalers and nebulizers. Five students were tested that day, including Angela who was one of the students that went to the US last fall. The student goes in front of the class and teaches an older student who acts as a patient, which is like our lab assistants during our simulation days. I found the exam interesting because their classmates observe and help the professor grade the simulation as well. The students did very well and got perfect scores. After the practical exam, we presented a PowerPoint we prepared describing each of us, so the students could get to know us better.



Anatomy Class with Nicolas Devaev

After the Psychology class, we went to Anatomy taught by Nicolas Devaev. The focus of the class is the heart. The class is small with only eight students. The students and Professor Devaev sat in one table and looked at human heart specimens. He explained to us that the heart is very important since heart disease is the number one cause of death throughout the world. I think the most interesting part of the class is being able to see a real human heart since we do not handle real human organs in anatomy classes in the US. Seeing a real human heart was very beneficial since the size and shape is different from other species. Before the class ended, Professor Devaev showed us more specimen that is available in his classroom, which included a collection of gallstones, fetuses, and human



A student sings during the performance

brains.

As a break, the students of Vladimir Medical College organized a performance for us. The performance was filled with singing, dancing, and comedy acts. Despite not knowing the Russian Language, we all loved the fun and inclusive atmosphere presented to us. The students were all very talented. After the performance, we had a tea break with Angela and the KNR study abroad group who were also in Vladimir. Angela baked a cake and different pastries for us which was very tasty and delicious. We also further met and socialized with the other faculty of the college. The tea session ended our time in the college, and we were off to Krendel for lunch. Lera and Egor, students we met at the picnic, walked us to Krendel, but only Lera ate lunch with us. After lunch, we had free time till meeting up with other Russian students.

Before dinner, we met up with Zoja Kharitonova and Marina Ratnikova for dinner and a walk around Vladimir. Zoja and Marina are two former students of the medical college. They also went to the US a few years ago as part of the exchange program. During the day, we also invited other students including Egor, Lera, Sabina, Nadir, and Sasha to go on the walk and dinner with us. We decided to eat dinner at a sushi restaurant before going for a walk. We visited the cathedral, the old pharmacy, the park, and took a picture at a sign that says "I love Vladimir." Overall, the day was very enjoyable.



"I love Vladimir" in Russian

May 23, 2017

Nina, Olga, and Nicolas picked us up around 8:20 to drive us to a baby's nursing home. The baby's nursing home is a form of orphanage specializing in taking care of children with disabilities ages 1 to 5 years old. The facility focuses on rehabilitation of the children and help them become as independent they could. The facility is funded by the government and is free for all the children. Despite being an orphanage, even family who have disabled children uses the facility as it is one of the best children rehab facility in the region. One item they are very proud of is a form of suit which is used to help the children learn how to stand, sit, and walk. The suit has helped several children with slight nerve disability to learn how to walk again. Throughout our tour, the passion and dedication of the health care workers could be seen and felt. They cared for the children as if they are their own. They are all very admirable and welcoming.



Phototherapy

After the baby's nursing home, we toured a rehabilitation center. It is very different from the rehabilitation clinics in the US since it includes alternative form of medicine. One type of alternative medicine available in the rehab center is a salt cave. The salt cave is used to treat respiratory infections. During the tour, I had a bit of a sore throat, so the facility offered to let me try a phototherapy treatment. The treatment consisted of a light being shined to my throat



MCN and KNR group tour of the Oncology Dispensary

for one to three minutes at each side. It helped my sore throat considerably, and by the end of the day, it was gone. The rehabilitation center is also free of charge for the residents of the Vladimir

Region since it is funded by the government. Our tour of the rehabilitation facility is cut short since we have a tour scheduled in the oncology dispensary with the KNR students.

We arrived at the oncology dispensary and waited for the KNR students since they were late for the tour. The oncology dispensary is a state of the art facility comparable to the cancer institute. They mostly showed us the CT scans, MRI, and Radiation. I think the most surprising aspect of the tour was how the cancer treatment is free for all residents of the region since it is very costly in the United States. One of our students asked whether the funding ever runs low, and the physician explain how there are more healthy people compared to sick people so the cost balances out.



For Lunch, we visited the Vladimir Gymnastic School where Vitali, one of the leaders of the school, welcomed us. Vitali was such an entertaining host. He fed us shashlik, which is one of our favorite Russian food. He was fun and kept making us laugh. He toured us around the facility and taught us the history of the gymnastic school. The Vladimir Gymnastic School came into prominence when Nikolai Adrianov became an Olympic champion and since then the gymnastic school has been known to produce Olympic medalist. During our tour, we saw Nikolai Kuksenkov practicing. He was a silver medalist in the 2016 Rio Olympics.

After the gymnastic school, Jumart took us to dinner in a restaurant. We were still full from our lunch, but Russian cuisines are very good. Jumart was also a very good host, and we enjoyed his stories very much. We went back to the hotel after dinner.



Vitali

May 24, 2017

We started off the day at 8:20am with our translator, Nina, bringing us to a school for a ceremony called the last bell to celebrate the end of the school year. The school was for grades 1-11, so the kids were ages 6-17. When we walked in the school was very lively, and music was playing through the halls. The students were carrying



balloons through the hallways and setting up the room for the ceremony with rows of chairs and a stage decorated very colorfully with ribbons, balloons, and flowers. The graduates wore old traditional uniforms of black dresses with a white apron over the top. The ceremony began with the younger children giving small speeches about each graduate, and there was a lot of singing and dancing acts. Something I learned about their culture is that they really value performing, art, and music. Anytime we went to a school or ceremony the students had some sort of performance prepared for us, and everyone was very talented.

After the school we went to a blood transfusion station. This was a place where people came to donate blood to supply to hospitals. We were given a tour of their clinic by the head physician. The donation process starts similar to ours with a check in window and questionnaire. Each person is put into a federal database to keep track of the amount of times they have donated. Before the donation process begins they do a quick checkup of the patient to make sure they're able to donate blood by measuring things like weight, blood pressure, and blood type. Then they would go upstairs to the donation part. They sit in chairs as their blood is being drawn and then get to stay and have a snack and rest afterwards. This



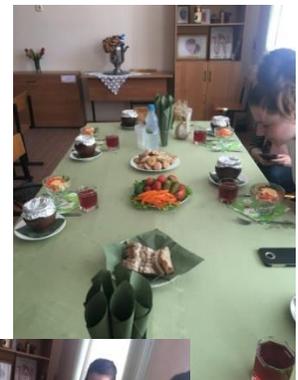
process reminded me a lot of how a blood drive would be set up in America. After donating they can choose to get paid cash or receive a complete lunch. Something unique about Russia that we learned is that they're able to take two paid days off of work after donating blood. We were also showed the lab areas where they separate the blood and test it for things like viruses, HIV, and hepatitis. The blood is tested three times before being sorted and stored by type and Rh factor. The red blood cells are able to be kept for 35 days, and the plasma can be frozen and kept for three years. When distributing the blood to the hospitals the physician told us that the freshest blood goes to women in labor and children. After the blood transfusion clinic, we went to the café Krendel for lunch.



Then after lunch we went to a dental clinic. In Russia the healthcare is free for all people and they have some facilities



funded by the state or federal government, and other places that are private. The dental clinic was a small private clinic, and reminded me off a typical dentist's office in America. We walked in to a lobby area with a receptionist desk, and exam rooms on both sides. The doctor there showed us their rooms for checkups, cleanings, and small procedures. The doctor was both a dentist and orthodontist and had been for 44 years now. The

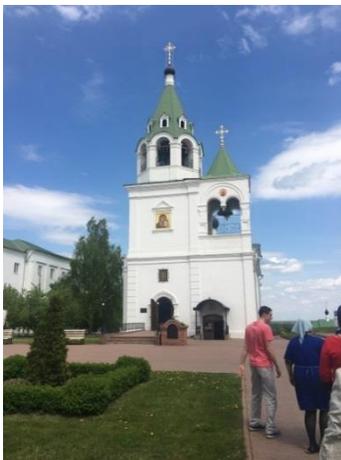
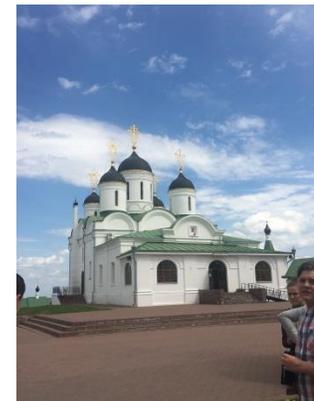
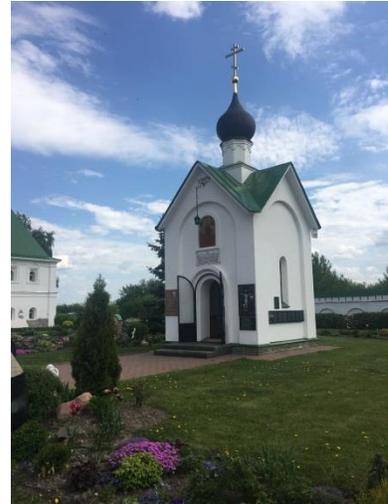


office also had a separate room for children's dentist appointments that had a TV attached to the dental chair so the children could watch cartoons, and also had Disney characters on the wall. Then we had free time and were able to rest a little in our hotel, and then decided to explore a little bit and went to a coffee shop we had seen earlier in the week. Later that night we ate dinner and then went to the nearby mall and supermarket to look around.



May 25, 2017

We left our hotel at 8:30am, and were driven to another city 2 hours away called Murom. First we went to the medical college there that was a branch off of Vladimir medical college. When we pulled up a group of students and instructors were waiting for us at the entrance of the school. Before entering the school, we started with a Russian tradition used to greet guests. They had a loaf of bread and a small bowl of salt and had us each break off a piece of bread and dip it in the salt. Then we were brought to meet the head master and administrators of the school, and had delicious tea and pastries with them. A student showed us their small museum of old textbooks, medical tools, and awards for their school throughout the years. They also had a case of various artworks made by the students that had won prizes, which again showed their fondness of art and theater. After the tour they performed a small concert for us with singing, folk dancing, and more. They also had prepared a quick PowerPoint about the town's history, and taught us how to make a traditional Russian doll. Afterwards we played some games together, were taught a simple folk dance, and ate lunch. Then the students and professors brought us to Murom's historical center that had many churches and monasteries. They taught us about the history, patron saints, legends of warriors, and we made wishes into a lucky pond. Another thing I noticed about their



culture is how rich in history each town is, and how proud the people were of their towns and regions. They loved sharing their town's stories, museums, and architecture with us. They also showed us a statue of a warrior of their town and a small local history museum that had statues of the different kinds of animals located in their region. Later that night we went back to Vladimir to go to a family's house for dinner. The family lived in an apartment in Vladimir. Living in an apartment is fairly common for them, and many people also have a country home they visit in the summer



time. One of the daughters of the family was a former student of Vladimir medical college. They gave us a tour of their house, fed us a large dinner, sang songs and played the piano to entertain us. The family had three daughters, and the oldest daughter had two sons of her own. They were very welcoming and kind, and fed us many delicious Russian dishes. This trip will help me be a more culturally sensitive nurse in many ways. By being immersed in a different culture I learned how to communicate with those who may not speak my language, appreciate another culture's history and traditions, and also how to understand and accept both our similarities and differences.

May 26, 2017

Today we ate breakfast at the hotel at 8:00 AM. At 9:30 AM we visited a Regional Children's Clinical Hospital, which is a free facility open to the public. The head nurse of the hospital was our guide. She has worked for the facility for 36 years. She taught us about how the facility has a shortage of 100 nurses. She explained the wages and training process for new nurses. We met the head of the hospital pharmacy. We then visited the different floors. On the trauma floor I noticed that they used a significant amount of traction to treat fractures. We visited an ENT floor and a floor for children from 1-3 years of age. Then we finished the tour by visiting the neonatal center.



At 11:15 AM while walking to our next facility, we quickly entered the main lobby of a private patient treatment center. This was an interesting experience to compare public and private treatment facilities. At 11:20 AM we visited the Vladimir Perinatal Center. Here we met two of the Deputy Head Physicians and the Head physician of the facility gave us a tour. This is considered a stage 3 facility, where they take in the most high-risk of patients. They have a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), an ICU for mother's, Labor and Delivery rooms, and birthing rooms. We walked by as 2 women were having a non-stress test done. We were also given permission to visit a room where two women who were 39 weeks pregnant were staying.

At 1:00 PM we went to shop for groceries and eat lunch at "Globus." This is essentially the equivalent to America's "Costco", "Sam's Club", or "HyVee" This was quite the experience. At 3:00 PM we visited a Nursing Home for Veterans. This home is new, not even a full year old. It houses 110 people and splits areas into blocks for 5 people to live, with 2-3 people per room. They had special facilities for the disabled, a gym, locker room, praying room, and an administrative block for conferences and entertainment. They even had a flat where a married couple lived together. The facility also catered to one man's hobby of gardening in which he was allowed to have plants throughout and outside his room. This was a very impressive facility. We finished the night off with dinner at Krendel at 6:00 PM and some casual shopping at the mall.

May 27, 2017

Today, we had breakfast at the hotel then walked down the road to a little coffee shop to start off our day. We worked together in order to translate our order and pay. The difficulty I found in ordering something as simple as coffee was eye opening. When being someone who is unfamiliar with a language or system of a new place, it is extremely difficult to communicate. The workers were very patient with us and I highly respected this. In my future career as a nurse, I plan to be patient, accommodating, and respectful to people from other cultures because I know what it is like to be in their position. We then were driven to the train station where we took a train to Moscow. The majority of this day consisted of sight seeing of the city. We admired the architecture and visited The Red Square. We ventured throughout the train station and took pictures in front of the beautiful buildings. We walked around a couple of the shopping centers and ordered some authentic ice cream. We then took the train back home and had dinner at Krendel at 6:00 PM. The weather was perfect and the city was amazing. I wish we had more time to spend in Moscow.

May 28, 2017

On this Sunday, our group was invited to a cathedral in Vladimir. We could attend the service and have tea and a tour with the priest and his family afterwards. This was one of my favorite days! The cathedral was beautiful inside and out and the service was unlike anything I had ever seen. It was much more traditional than I am used to and I enjoyed that. Everyone seemed so focused and like they wanted to be there. All the women, including our group, are required to wear head scarves and I thought this was such a simple and way to show respect. When we were invited to tea afterwards, we could spend time with the priest, his wife, and their son. They were some of the kindest and welcoming people I encountered on this trip. It was obvious how much they all loved each other and their happiness radiated to everyone around them. There was no shortage of tea, pastries, and chocolates and it was a very fun, and relaxing time. We were then led on an excursion around the cathedral and saw classrooms and a small library. The cathedral seemed more like a home. The best part was travelling all the way up a set of spiral stairs to the bell tower and being able to pull the strings and ring them all. It was out of my comfort zone but I felt both excited and safe the whole time. By ringing the bells, we were promised that we would have children in our future.

There were lots of similar traditions throughout the trip and I thought they were both fun while giving me a strange sense of security. After exchanging gifts and leaving for the day, I felt a sense of airiness and happiness that made me want to never leave. These people truly showed me what beautiful people live in Russia and how simple it is to be kind to one another. I still don't understand everything about the Russian Orthodox religion or most religions for that matter but by spending time with this family after services, it was so easy to see them simply as people instead of a priest, priest's wife, and priest's son. The idea of how I could holistically care for these people or anyone of a different religion from myself seemed so simple and attainable after this.

Later on in the day, we visited another family for tea. They lived in a beautiful two-story home. The family consisted of the grandmother, the parents, their daughter, her son, and the family dog. Once again, I could feel how much they all loved and respected each other. They invited us into their home with open arms and did not hesitate to give us tour and make us feel comfortable. Their home was more similar to homes in America and they shared with us how

they had dreamed for a home like this for so long and worked very hard to earn it. They were very proud and very modest at the same time. We enjoyed tea and some delicious pastries that I had not yet seen on the trip. Each one was delicious. We learned about how the daughter is a dentist, her mother was once a ballerina, and how the father and his grandson practice sports together. They were a high-achieving family and their hard working spirit and love for life was contagious. After leaving, I found myself inspired by them and wanting to be like them. To have a home of my own one day, become a successful professional, and be surrounded by a loving family.

Seeing how similar their life was to mine in America reminded me how similar everyone around the world is. In the future, when treating people of other cultures, ethnicities, or nationalities, I will remember this trip, and this family, and the fact that people are more similar than different, with similar desires, all around the world.