

# Three Worlds, One Heart

*Sara Pulsipher*



I stood near the wall at the *Navidad Azul* concert and felt that something was different. People chattered all around me. Most of it was in English. My husband, who speaks very little Spanish, whispered something to me in Russian. I replied with a small chuckle, but my mind was elsewhere. I pondered my predicament, wondering if anyone else felt it as well. I was standing in three different worlds at once, yet, it seemed normal.

Culture is a peculiar topic. To fully understand it, you must not only study it, but also live it. Living a particular culture involves speaking the language (be it metaphorically or literally) of the people with whom you wish to communicate, which is why missionaries from our church are tasked with mastering their mission language within a span of eighteen months to two years. If you don't understand the language, you can't speak it. If you can't speak the language, you can't communicate, and no communication means that there will be no conversion on either end.

Once they learn the language, however, the foreign speaker might recognize that they are not the same person in one language as they are in the other. Certain mannerisms, body language, and thought processes that the speaker gains might be the opposite of how they normally speak, feel, and act in their mother tongue.

My feelings during *Navidad Azul* were a result of taking a moment to analyze the separate languages. I learned Spanish in high school and became quite fond of it, grasping quickly how learning this beautiful language gave me a key to unlock a door to millions of people's hearts. I received my LDS mission call to serve in St. Petersburg, Russia and was forced to let go of that key for a time in pursuit of a new one: Russian. Over the course of eighteen months, I forgot the Spanish way as I roamed across the land of the Tsars.

I returned home and within a year my prince charming swept me off my feet. We met on our missions and continue to build our love for each other by speaking Russian at home, but this past August I was drawn back into the world of the Spanish language. The farther I travel in my study of the language, the more I fall in love with the people I once knew so well. However, now it's not quite the same.

Standing in the room during *Navidad Azul*, I saw a different light in the eyes of those who spoke Spanish on their missions. Comparing this to the feeling I get when I speak Russian, I recognized how quickly you can understand a culture by speaking with someone that speaks the culture's language. The language and the people that the returned Spanish-speaking missionaries love so much have a very different story than those my husband and I became acquainted with. As I looked into the eyes of those around me, I recognized that the Hispanic culture has hope at its core. They have faced challenges and still do, but their hearts and souls are filled with hope. They know how to look for happiness. In contrast, when I speak Russian and converse with those who have lived in Russia, I feel a depth of pride and a heaviness that can't quite be explained.

This thought and others raced through my mind as I, a native English speaker, attempted to immerse myself in the worlds of Spanish, Russian, and English at the same time. And it somehow worked. God's marvelous work and glory is that all of his children, male and female, bond and free, Russian and Hispanic, will be able to live in harmony. This is possible when individuals open their hearts to a new language.

Everyone speaks their own language; everyone understands that language differently. The Hispanic culture, as well as the Russian culture, taught me how to open my heart to a new world. I've learned compassion for those I don't understand. Instead of looking down upon immigrants or fearing the Russian people, I have learned to come to know the individual and understand them before I judge them. Nelson Mandela stated: "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart." To truly understand someone, you must understand their heart. Standing there at *Navidad Azul*, my mind tried to understand the different worlds I was a part of, but my heart understood them all. I am grateful for that moment as well as every other moment that will come because I've taken the time to develop a gift that helps me understand a different world.