

Hi everyone,

I am already two weeks into my trip and project and this is my first letter home because I was simply so busy talking to people, conducting interviews and writing.

I have to admit that this is a completely different experience conducting research in unfamiliar countries. I have to get to know the country and its customs first before I can do anything else, but what is great is that this way my work is less structured and more exciting. I am currently in Turkey. Although I did not have as many interviews scheduled as I will have in Russia, the stories are finding me themselves. Somehow, it seems that life puts me on the path where I meet the right people. They are very open to talk. I am so glad that I made some late changes and picked Turkey as a destination for the project, which will be key. I learned something completely new here. Apparently, Turkey is the country where many Russian girls meet their European clients/boyfriends since they do not need a visa to Turkey. I met a couple of girls who fly to Turkey every week to meet with their men. I could go on and on with the stories, but I guess I will just include them in my writing.

I also shadowed for one of the subjects in action for a couple of days and, honestly, this was quiet shocking.

I also encountered some challenges down the road. The interviews and the stories that I was getting did not always fit what I was looking for. Since I had the same experience prior year in my research for my Haas Scholars project, I decided to just go with the flow and allow myself to write about everything I am learning and noticing.

One other challenge is homesickness! It is always hard to leave the familiar ways behind and allow yourself to be open to everything that comes your way. Also, the subject of the study makes it extra difficult. Sometimes, I get excited about what these women tell me and what I learn from them. But sometimes I get very upset and question their ways. I feel like there is a battle inside me about what I am writing about. At times I want to be understanding, but at times I become judgmental.

Lets see that happens next...

Thank you and best wishes,

Katya Moiseeva

Hello Everyone,

This is my second update about the most exciting, yet challenging project that I have ever done!

I have already left Turkey and just arrived to Moscow. I should say this should be an easier and at the same time harder part of my trip. Easier in terms that my friend is hosting me here for some time which will help emotionally and financially. Harder in terms that it is heartbreaking and upsetting to see "The Russian Way of Living," as I may call it for now.

Even though I haven't been in Moscow for a very long time yet, I already had two very interesting and very long interviews! To make a long story shorter, you should judge the level of excitement for yourself. One of my subjects was a young woman who is originally from Siberian part of Russia, but currently lives in Moscow. She worked in Japan for over ten years as she managed to keep an exclusive relationship with one of the high-level managers from Toyota. At the same time, she was married back home to a Russian criminal! As surprised as you might be right now, I was also shocked that a criminal would allow this to happen. The "princess life" of my subject, though, was filled with interesting stories. One of the stories that I was interested in was about hate, crime and betrayal, but I will open all the cards in a final product. Just to give an idea, my subject was robbed by her classmate, who took all the jewelry given by the Japanese lover, and then her criminal husband was killed a week later. My other subject was a Moscow born woman who is a "go-go dancer". She worked in many parts of the world including Turkey, Dubai, Moscow. As you probably expect, go-go dancing is not the limit of the services that she provides. What was the most interesting about this interview is a story of running away from the Turkish criminal authorities who 'ordered' my subject and four other of her friends not for dancing, but for sex-slavery. So sorry to shorten her story, but it is taking me a while to transcribe it because of the level of details that she shared. Another interesting thing that happened during this particular interview was that this subject spent a great deal of educating me about the differences between the Moscow girls and provincial girls, which I think I will develop further in here.

A lot of interesting things are happening in Moscow. It seems that I get an inspiration to write from everything I see. I have a feeling that the world is upside down here! For example, everywhere in Metro, there are campaign ads that advertise "Rich Foreign Husbands with a Car." I am breaking my head what to make out of these campaigns and whether a car ownership defines wealth. Also, just the interviews themselves make me scared and confused about the way things and relationships in particular are in Russia. Especially, what the women are ready to tolerate for money, shoes, visits to restaurants, etc. Shocking, shocking, shocking!

I write a lot as I go. Of course, I write about the crazy stories that the women share with me, but I also spend a lot of time writing about my thoughts about everything I see and how confusing and different I find this world-the underground world that is normal in here.

I am also expanding my methods. For example, I almost 'hunt down' women and the foreigners who date these women in Metro, grocery shops, etc. Sometimes, it is enough for me to just observe. Some of you might get concerned with my well-being, but I keep my head cool and stay out of trouble. I guess I stay out of trouble as much as one can when they are dealing with the shady world. (I wish I had as much support as the CNN reporters have who currently work on the project to reduce sex work around the world).

I can continue on and on...but to finish this short update, I want to thank everyone one more time for the opportunity, trust and support!

Katya

Dear Everyone,

It is amazing to be back to the US after a long trip in Turkey and then Russia!

Currently, I am in the most frustrating stage of my project – translating interviews and organizing them into a readable material, i.e. essays, chapters... The difficulty I face is that the interviews I collected sound much better in Russian! The language is more expressive as it depicts the women's emotions much better. Maybe, the problem is that after speaking Russian for several months with my subjects, I lost some of my academic English! So forgive me if this letter sounds discordant! (My friends say that I have more foreign accent now.)

I am working closely with my advisor Professor Steven Fish, and, dear God, I appreciate him so much as he is the only one who is able to put my ideas into a perspective. Some challenges I face after talking to him, though, is that I often feel like misrepresenting Russian women! Hearing myself speak, I think that I am turning into someone preaching that all Russian women are prostitutes. This is not the case. Yet, the problem is so acute in there that I hope I am doing the right thing.

I am looking forward to taking a short break in my project during the holiday season and doing more writing for the graduate schools. (I am sure that some of you are doing the same!) I made some drastic changes and decided to apply to Sociology departments, as there is nothing else I enjoy as much as qualitative research. Hopefully, this is a right choice.

Soon, I will return to the field. I will first go to the Russian Far East and then, China. In preparations for this trip, I am continuing emailing back and forth with potential subjects. I also connected with a Khabarovsk journalist, Olga Novak, who is investigating the same issue. I am looking forward to collaboration with her and, potential, writing an article for the local newspaper!

In general, things are moving, now slower than in the field.

P.S. I wish everyone a great Holidays Season!

Sincerely,

Katya Moiseeva

January 2012

Hello Everyone!

I hope all is going well with you and your projects, and that the Holiday season was fun and memorable!

It has been a while since I wrote last, and I know I made some of you worried. I did not mean to do so, but I got so involved with my project that I literally forgot about how fast the days fly!

I am in Russian Far East right now and it is probably not the most fun place to be in! The temperature is negative 30 Celsius!!! And even though I was born and raised in this region, six years in California left its mark on me. Luckily, I have my best friend here who gave me a fur coat and some warm boots!!!

There are many other aspects of everyday life that are so different in Russia and that I cannot help but notice. It is colder inside the buses than on the streets. Once, I stayed late with my interviewee and had to take a taxi back... OMG, the roads are so icy that the car kept turning and the driver kept cursing as he could not regain the control of the vehicle. I was so scared, but it is such a common thing for the locals. Often, there is no hot water and it is difficult to take a shower. In sum, all these little things seem to be so wild and crazy to me, something that I no longer understand, but they are just a part of living in a remote city.

About my project, I spent a week in Khabarovsk and now am in Vladivostok. I conducted some interviews with Russian women who work abroad, yet I am also finding a lot of material about localized sex-entertainment. It turns that since many Japanese and Chinese delegations of officials come to Vladivostok (naval port), women who entertain them do not need to travel as much.

One observation that I am making is that "globalization" is on its way to such remote parts as Russian Far East. What I mean is that since the last time I came here to interview women (summer 2010), lots of things have changed. For example, Internet soliciting is much more common now in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok than even a year ago. One of my subject introduced me to the website [Mamba.ru](http://Mamba.ru) - and, Oh My! It is one thing that this site is a great help in finding interesting interviews. However, I cannot believe it is not censored! If any of you remember the Emperors Club case that brought down the NY governor, I do not understand why Russian society and officials cannot do the same. In general, I get more and more interested in how access to the Internet shapes and alters the sex-industry in Russia. I am thinking of writing a short article about this.

I wish I did as much writing as I did in Moscow and Turkey! I think it is just a temporary writers' block, or a lack of sun. In general, I am very satisfied with my

progress, although at times, I feel very melancholic – being away from family is difficult.

Sincerely, Katya

Hi Everyone,

I am back to the US!!!! What a trip did I have!

So, this time around I went to my native city of Khabarovsk from where I traveled to the nearby cities such as Vladivostok and Petropalovsk-Chamchatskij. As usual, I had many interviews, but I would like to talk particularly about the women whom I re-interviewed (these are the women I met two years ago for the Haas project). It was exciting to learn about how they and their families were, what changed in their lives and what stayed the same. It was very sad to hear that for the most part women continued the same lifestyle, although many of the women complained that their occupation is not as fun as it used to be. Some reasons for less fun were: 1) women felt like they grew out of their professions and that they started to get concerned that they do not have a supportive and reliable partners to grow old together; 2) some complained about the ageism that they face from the recruiters (agencies want much younger girls); 3) some complained that the clients, due to an increased number of women available, do not treat them accordingly (especially regulars). Interestingly enough, when I spoke to the women whom I have a relationship for several years already, I felt more like a therapist or a friend. It was definitely a different experience from when I met them for the first time. So many of them were interested in my story now, how I got to the US, what is the US like, how do people treat me since I am an immigrant. One thing I noticed is that when I met these women (lets call the "oldies" meaning I know them for a long time) for the first time, I used to look up to them in a sense that their eyes were sparkling when they talked about their lives, they seemed to enjoy their lifestyles so much. This time around however, I saw a lot of emptiness and disappointment.

Since I am so much more familiar and comfortable with navigating around Khabarovsk than any other place I visited, I got to speak with a lot of women who were either friends or friend of friends, and who took special classes in how to please men, what they called "personal development." I was interested in whether there is much differences between women who openly admit that they take money for sexual services and women who fall into a grey area of looking for a man that would support them, but at the same time are not sex workers. I am convinced more and more that Russia's sexual culture is shifting in a strange direction in general meaning that the line between the two groups of women is vague. To inquire more into this idea, I am currently researching Igor Kon's works (Russian sexologists) about sexual revolution in Russia and post-Soviet changes in gender roles.

So far everything is moving a little slower than I originally intended, but I was ready for this from the very beginning. I hope all is well with you, too!!!

Sincerely, Katya

Hello everyone,

As the Stronach year is coming to an end, I have to admit that this was one of the most exciting, rewarding, yet challenging years I've had.

I have been done with all my travels for a while now. As I am sure many of you know, my last travel was to Beijing, but it did not go as well as I expected. Although, I conducted some interviews, in general it took me much longer to navigate the area than in other countries. (I did plan to go to Shanghai as well, but that did not happen either for several reasons, but primary because of costly accommodations). Honestly, I am quite disappointed with the trip to China, except that one Russian woman that I was put in touch with in China is coming to Portland, US permanently in August (as a bride). She is very open to continuing our relationship and I am excited to observe how her life evolves in the US! She also has a ten year old son whom she is leaving behind in Russia with his grandmother for some time till they would be able to reconnect.

I remember Leah Carroll (the Haas Scholarship coordinator) once said that she "wrote her book on Friday nights." That was Leah's way of working full time, raising her daughters, and at the same time continuing to write. So as far as my own writing goes, I follow Leah's footsteps. No matter what happens during Monday through Friday, regardless how tired or uninspired I am, every Friday night I get in front of computer and write. Even if it is only for a couple of hours, it still helps me to keep focused on putting together a narrative of the lives of these Russian women.

When I returned from my very first extensive travel for the "writing" part of the project, I had much less discipline even though I had the entire time devoted just to writing. Could be that I was still in the process of outlining. Yet, now I am much more disciplined and focused with my writing. I originally intended to finish the chapters in graduate school with the mentor's supervision. Yet, with the recent changes in my life, I have decided to defer graduate school for a year and I am planning on working and finishing on my own. Fortunately, I have some amazing friends from Berkeley that are not only willing to proof read and edit my ideas, but are the ones pushing me and keeping me on track! I reorganized my writing structure several times, but what worked the best was going back to my original thesis and building on it.

Sincerely, Katya