

**A Business Meeting in Russia:  
The US Consul General Welcomes  
American Fulbright Students to St. Petersburg**

***Arriving at The Mansion***

Surprisingly, it wasn't raining on October 20<sup>th</sup> when I arrived at the residence of Mr. Morris Hughes, the Consul General of The US Consulate in St. Petersburg, Russia. On this particular evening, I and the seven other American Fulbright students studying in St. Petersburg were invited to Mr. Hughes' home for a security briefing followed by a family reception.

Upon my arrival, I went through security and entered the biggest cloakroom (гардеробщица) I have ever seen in my entire life. It was the size of a large bedroom, complete with a bathroom, mirrors, and a shoe-polish machine! I enjoyed the "free" soap and toilet paper, and did my best to fix up my hairbun and hide my ballet shoes before entering the orientation room.

***The Security Briefing***

The Assistant Regional Security Officer, Chris Sparks, began his briefing by citing an important case that has recently received much publicity in St. Petersburg. "The racial beating and murder of a Vietnamese student at The St Petersburg Polytechnical Institute can no longer be called a *rare* incident in this city," he began. "Unfortunately, racial killings, attacks on foreigners, and an increase in petty theft are on the rise in St. Petersburg." (I can personally attest to the latter!)

Some rather shocking statistics for the city of St. Petersburg followed: on average, one American reports a stolen purse or wallet everyday, one or two Americans are hit by a car every week, and three out of five student beatings resulted in deaths last week alone. Following this "welcome" of sorts, Mr. Sparks addressed specific measures we can take as students and foreign travelers to exercise our best street sense. The message was clear: safety is a serious issue in this city – especially today.

***The Reception***

The dreary mood that had emerged following this discussion was quickly replaced with laughter, smiles, and a smattering of mixed Russian-English phrases that were exchanged over a lovely reception. The Consul General had invited a variety of special guests to meet the Fulbright students: members of American Citizen Services at The Consulate, cultural attaches, university faculty and administrators, and Russian and American Fulbright alumni.

Delicious Russian dishes were served in a buffet style. My favorite was the traditional dish of grilled mushrooms smothered in cheese and sour cream (грибы с сыром и сметаной). I joked, "I think we eat this same dish in the dormitory, but it's hard to know for sure – most of the food we eat is not recognizable!" (The students seemed to think my comment was funny, but the special guests were not amused.)

***Russian-American Networking:***

I had been in Petersburg for six weeks prior to this reception, and during that time, I had distributed a total of four business cards. While meeting professors at The St Petersburg Conservatory and working in the studios on my choreography, few opportunities had evolved to discuss my emerging business in Philadelphia. All of that changed at this reception.

I spoke with Ms. Betty Hughes, the wife of The Consul General about my search for performance opportunities overseas as well as my interest in meeting Russian female entrepreneurs. I spoke about my technical production needs for the choreography I am crafting at The Conservatory, and found several individuals who could help. I also discovered that the daughter of Jeffrey Murray, the Consul of Press and Culture, hopes to attend Temple University, my own alumna mater. In fact, in the course of just ninety minutes, I had run out of all of the business cards I had been carrying around for the last six weeks.

Now, I am busy following up with the diverse and important opportunities that seem to be increasingly emerging for me in Russia.

I have come to the conclusion that networking takes many different forms. In the studio, the ability to forge relationships with other artists is determined by the quality of your physical work, especially in a performance setting. In Russian-American social circles, it is more about the business card. Who would have ever thought that pointe shoes and business cards go hand-in-hand in Russia?

***To Learn More About Rebecca Davis' studies and travel experiences, visit The Rebecca Davis Dance Company website at [www.rebeccadavidance.com](http://www.rebeccadavidance.com) or email [davis@rebeccadavidance.com](mailto:davis@rebeccadavidance.com)***

***To Read About Rebecca's dance experiences at The St. Petersburg Conservatory, join "The Journey in Russia" listserv. Sign up for the listserv at [www.rebeccadavidance.com](http://www.rebeccadavidance.com).***

*Photo:*

*Mr. Morris Hughes and Rebecca Davis  
Fulbright Reception in St. Petersburg, Russia*

