

A JOURNEY OF POLITENESS, GENEROSITY AND OPENNESS

A text by Jesús Palomino

Ivan, that was the name of my partner in that conversation, and myself, were having a cup of red wine at a very warm birthday party. I did not know him, and he did not know me, but, nevertheless, Ivan asked me straight forward: *Well, this is a typical question to do to any foreigner arrived in Ekaterinburg? Is it your first visit to Russia, right? And, how do you feel here? What do you think about the people and the city itself?*

And, I, straight forward answered him: *Well, I find myself very comfortable here. I met really polite, generous and open people.* Ivan suddenly jumped uncomfortably on his chair with some difficulties to swallow his red wine: *Oh, I see ! But, that's not the common image that foreigners have of Russia and Russian people !!!*

And, I replied Ivan again: *Well, I could reach to understand that you can find here in Russia, like any other country around the world, rude, disgusting and narrow-minded people. But, I didn't meet them !!!*

Well, - said Ivan - you are very lucky !

And, I replied: Yes, I am in fact very lucky !

My partner in that conversation was absolutely disappointed with my positive impressions about the city and its citizens. But, believe me, that's exactly how it happened. Ivan didn't realize that questioning was such a risky and disappointing activity specially if you do it with a prejudiced spirit.

The train station in Alapayevks narrow gauge train Co. is efficiently organized, a pleasant location with the human atmosphere of those places that "belong to the people", and this such a human atmosphere is there probably because the train at that area of the Urals is a very important tool of

social cohesion and economical development. What I found at Alapayevks train depot during my first meeting with the traindrivers and staff Co. was openness, generosity and politeness. I should name it as HUMAN DIGNITY, but if I use those words someone could accuse myself of being excessive. I felt comfortable immediately. In fact, an inspiring place to start my art project. I immediately recognized all those human and social peculiar ingredients surrounding trains that I know from my childhood since my father himself was a traindriver for 40 years at the Spanish National Railway Co. My father passed away exactly one year ago; anyhow, I felt that he was there with me, by my side, supporting the project, enjoying our time and the adventure of reaching Kalach with the help of Alapayevks narrow gauge Train Co.

Everything was prepared for the success of the project. Every single need of the production was defined and organized with exquisite attention, I should say with *"love for the details"*, to have our trip considered as simply perfect thanks to the Alapayevks Train Co., Piort and Yekaterina. Thanks as well to Genia, Natalia, Natasha, Timofey, Boris and Misha. Well, I shall not insist in the journey since it is explained in the film that we produced; hence, I should suggest to any interested person on the project, to watch the video and listening the 8 hours audio file of Kalach's natural environment to get a clear idea and joining the spirit of the project KALACH'S SOUNDSCAPE FOR CITIZENS.

Following Genia Tchaika's suggestions when she invited me to write about my impressions, please, allow me to focus in another important glimpses of beauty, another realities regarding my time in Russia:

1. I met Boris in the center of the almost abandoned small town of Kalach. We, Natasha Shipilova and myself, were just walking around the city center when I saw a small man dressed with a soviet militar jacket looking directly on us. This man was just standing up at the gate of his *dasha*. I made a gesture with my hand to say hello, and, he answered me back with his hand too saying hello. *Let's talk to him* - I suggested to Natasha. And, that was what we did. His name was Boris, he had a not very tall slim body inside his militar jacket with golden buttons; his hands were stained with blue-violet color. *I was picking up some blue berrys* in the forest this morning. I sell them to make some small extra money - said Boris. He had a vivid presence, mild manners and a humoristic

look; the look of someone smart living almost in completely solitude a big part of the year. I did not understand his Russian but Natasha translated to me some of his comments: Well, some years ago Kalach was doing much better. We had shops, school and a couple of bars. In the recent months, at least five people just left the village. We are all getting old here; you know, life is just easier in the city... In fact, I do not like Kalach anymore; I can't go to the cinema ! Boris was telling us all those not so happy stories about the vanishing Kalach with a resigned air. I wondered myself what kind of movies Boris would enjoy better !

2. I asked Genia Tchaika suddenly during one of our artists dinners: *Why Alexander Pushkin is so important for Russian Literature? I see him everywhere.* Genia gave me the best answer to my question: *Pushkin coined and structured the modern Russian Literature with his poems, ideas and political braveness.*

3. Alexander Morozov's drawing session tracking with black ink on a paper birds duration flights and their trajectory in the air within the city. One hour session. Inspiring moment ! I suggested him to listen Olivier Messiaen's piano music *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Alexander confessed me that he loves Messiaen.

4. The best food that I had in Ekaterinburg was cooked by a traindriver, Piort. Piort cooked for us fish soup by the train station in Kalach, our private open air restaurant during our visit to the city. The receipt was extremely simple and pure cooked with potatoes, fresh onion, carrots, and of course, excellent river fish from that area. Really delicious !

5. In our way back during the night from Kalach to Sankina, the train driver allowed us to travel in the open wagon. The air was not very cold and the speed of the train (30 km/h) perfect to enjoy the forest, the sky and the marvellous dome of stars above us. Natasha, Timofey, Boris and myself, had the best trip in a train for years.

6. I brought into Russia my two books of essays by Iosif Brodsky, *Less than One* and *On Grief and Reason*. I purchased them in New York, and probably they represent to me one of my life treasures. No matter what you feel about poetry, the former Soviet Union, or the actual state of the world, any person of culture should read those two books. I hope not to be a little bit exaggerated, but, I consider that any reader will emerge as a better human being after the reading. Not because literature has nothing to do with holiness, goodness, or shallow Enlightenment; on the contrary, according to Iosif Brodsky assessments, literature and literary production comes from gargabe (the gargabe can of History with its stories of assassinations, traitors, wars, desperate loves, escandals, forbidden sex, envy, bankruptcy, exile, cultural assassination, and so on and so forth), he himself couldn't assure either that poetry got a nobler origin. For me personally, those two books full of brave compassion and smart skeptical understanding of History represent the highest sample of language potentiality and eloquence. Eventually, those books will lead you to Brodsky's refined poetry, and then, those poems will allow you to understand Brodsky's genuine commitment with Humanism and deep love for Russian language. Those books will assure thousand years more of Russian culture, ten centuries more of refined aesthetical experience for Russian literature, and fortunately because translations exist, available for the rest of the Humankind.

7. *Nadiezdha*, a Russian word that I recovered during my days in Ekaterinburg. I read once Nadiezdha Mandelstam's self-biography, *Hope Against Hope*, a deeply desperate narration about exile, totalitarianism and cultural assesination. Nadiezdha is Hope in English, Hoffnung in German, in French l'Espoire, Esperanza in Spanish... My wife's name is Esperanza, I mean, Nadiezdha, Hope. Is it not misterious that we have so many different words for the same reality? Because, what is it a Russian Hope? And, what is it a Spanish one? What about Egyptian? And Syrian? My wife visited Russia on July 1991, one month before the coup, Yeltsin, the tanks, and so on. A harsh time in recent Russian History. I love Nadiezdha, I mean, I love Esperanza, my wife, my partner of life, she saved my life in a way. In this point, I should avoid to write myself superficial poems devoted to Nadiezdha, called Esperanza in Spanish, having into account Russian achievements in the field of love poetry ! I shall express it in a simple manner: I love to do my art, and I was invited to the Ural Biennial to build up my project within very generous, polite and open-minded margins... I am grateful for that, and very lucky too, as I said to Ivan at the beginning of this text. I am lucky

because my time in Ekaterinburg brought me a clear experience of art production. A very sweet and inspiring time of hope, in fact ! Nadiezdha, my love, Esperanza !

J E S U S P A L O M I N O

August 2015

Ekaterinburg, Russia