

What Surprised Me About USA As a Russian Immigrant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twvMeSIfsig>

Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/russia3.pdf>

Hello, my name is Maria and I moved to the United States when I was 18 or 19 and that was 14 years ago ~~so~~ [and] it's been a roller coaster.

I would like to ~~make a list of~~ [tell you about] things that have surprised me ~~in~~ both [at] the beginning of my moving in here, in the first couple years, as well as the ones that I have noticed throughout my life here.

My whole family lives in Russia and I live in the United States in ~~now~~ California [and] I have lived ~~on~~ in Maryland as well so I kind of know [the] east [coast] and [the] west [coast and their] differences as well as differences between Russia [and] the United States.

I ~~have~~ moved [away from Russia] ~~however~~ in [the] early 2000s so life is slightly different now in Russia for sure, but because my family lives there I can compare a lot of things that we go through together between Russia and the United States now.

So here's my list: smiling and apologizing a lot.

When I first moved here I don't think I used to smile as much as I do now and I don't think I used to say sorry as much as I do now.

On one side it is quite pleasant, it's almost of good taste to say "I'm sorry" or "excuse me" as well as smiling extremely often.

When you're in Russia you're probably not going to be smiled at as much at all unless it's something funny or something sweet in a way.

But here in the United States you just smile for any reason even if ~~you~~ [you're] sad or upset.

[It's the] same thing like [when] you [are] asked "how are you?" or "how is it going?"

You don't really honestly feel that you care about that but you you ask anyway and I find it to be comforting ~~you on one side~~ [in a way].

But because we all know that the person might not actually ~~fully~~ care to smile at you or say sorry to you it becomes ~~almost desanitized?~~ [routine] and sometimes not sincere in a way.

But I do that myself now.

It's almost ~~my~~ second nature [to] say sorry and also smiling all the time so I can't really judge for that too, but it's a weird thing.

[Next,] so when ~~me and my husband~~ [my husband and I] moved in [together], the first time we had a cold, he had a cold, I was absolutely shocked at what he was doing.

You won't believe it! You might believe it.

So the first time my husband got sick he said to me, “oh my god I have a sore throat, I think I'm gonna go get some orange juice.” and I'm like, okay, so he picked up like, cold, almost frozen orange juice.

Then he said, “You know what? I think I'll get some iced popsicles.”

And I'm like, what?

I was so shocked to see that he treated his cold with cold and not heat.

I [said] like, no, no, no, no, that's not how you do this.

I feel like, no, no he's supposed to ~~put~~ [have] hot, hot stuff, [not] ~~don't play~~ cold, it's gonna make it worse.

So when I told my parents, I'm like, oh, Darryl's throat is sore ~~yeah~~ [and] he's, he's, eating iced popsicles!

And they were like why? It was super hilarious.

I did not expect it at all, but I guess it's a thing [and] it ~~a little bit makes sense~~ [makes a little bit of sense].

I still treat my all of my colds with heat, with steaming ~~with~~ hot water, gargling, and with, like, pulling water ~~in~~ [up in to] your nose and flushing it out and all that kind of stuff.

I still do not ~~do cold~~ [use his cold treatments] but he still does every time he gets sick.

He's, like, “Oh my gosh, my throat hurts I've got to get some popsicles” and I'm like, you're a weirdo.

Tell me I'm not the only one who was weirded out by this.

Anyway, [next,] talking, talking to cashiers. I don't think I have ever ~~talks~~ [talked] to any service people when I was in Russia and I still don't think people really do that, but here everybody's just talking and chatting away and talking about their life with random strangers.

And [this] usually happens in stores of some kind, especially at the cashier's register.

They really can ask you a question and you can just tell them your whole day's story and they'll be attentively listening and sometimes even participating as if they care, so that's quite a wondrous thing.

Also most of the time ~~I~~ [it] actually holds [up] the whole line behind you and everybody is very nice and very polite to not say “please hurry up.”

I feel like in Russia [this] would not have been that way.

People would have said, “can you just not talk right now.”

So that's also a very weird thing that I have experienced, just talking to strangers ~~specifically~~ [especially in] the service area.

[Next,] I noticed right away that the roads made so much sense.

The road system is ~~done~~ [designed] for you to easily ~~transport~~ [go] from one place to the other.

And ~~constantly~~ [always] I see, even in my area, if there's ~~too much housing builds~~ [a lot of new housing being built] they ~~make~~ [expand the] roads [and make new roads] just to ~~balance~~ [reduce congestion.] ~~so all off they make exits and they're widen the roads almost right away.~~

I find that endearing and very smart and ~~very~~ I guess it's normal but it it helps a lot that infrastructure ~~this way is builds~~ [is built] to help the person to get from one place to the other in the minimum amount of time.

[Next,] I was surprised that McDonald's food was actually not as good as I thought it would be.

When you watch American movies, they often eat these burgers in McDonald's and Burger King and you think it's like a cool thing to do and it probably tastes incredible since they're showing you [this] all the time.

But actually, once you move here, you understand that this is not the best ~~optional~~ [choice of] food for most people.

And I have tried McDonald's in my, in my small town, in Lipetsk and in Moscow and those burgers were incredible.

And I thought that they would be the same ~~way~~ [in America] so maybe the food control is different in different places.

But, yeah, McDonalds is not something that I am looking forward to having.

[Next,] I was shocked to see that your holidays are almost non-existent and your vacation days are like a week a year together with the sick days.

When I was In Russian we had a month of sick days and a month of off days for holidays and they pay you for the holidays as well.

So it was really incredible to see that when I moved here I had only one week to be sick or to skip for any other health reasons during the work day and only one week for actual vacation time.

And when I used to go to Russia [for] one week, ~~just travel~~ [it just did not] ~~does not~~ make sense to go for one week so I had to take no sick days and no off days [during] the whole year just so I could leave for two weeks straight and see my family fully because it's such a long flight and drive and everything.

So I was really, really shocked to see that happening.

You definitely have to be a real hard worker in the United States.

Work, it's clockwork with nobody slacking.

I remember in Russia it was just more, more relaxed I think as far as work went.

I'm sure it's getting worse now.

I know that I have some family who are saying that they're definitely implementing a harder structure just scheduling {something????} which is harder for the workers.

But yeah, just imagine if you had a month to take off for health reasons a year and another month on top of that.

So [you really had] two months off ~~pretty much~~ for vacation time, that's crazy, that's, that's beautiful.

Plus the holidays here in United States are very scarce unless you work for a government development or some kind of business that's government-run.

You're probably not gonna have any days off besides, maybe, again, like five days a whole year, which is like the Fourth of July, Christmas, New Year's Day - like some of the top ones.

{The others are Memorial Day, Labor Day and Thanksgiving}

But in Russia we used to have three days around one holiday.

So, for example, we have 1st of May and usually you have three days off for just that one holiday.

Yeah that's, that's different too, that's tough.

[Next,] the United States has so ~~much culture~~ [many different cultures] and so much food.

You can taste, so many different cultures you can meet, so many different people from all over the world.

It's just [an] unlimited amount.

I remember in Russia we just used to have Russian food, versions of Russian food and then Russian / Muslim foods that ~~kind of just merged from other countries there used to be a USSR a part of USSR~~ [came from the Soviet republics] that became Russian food anyway.

But here you have every nationality that's possible.

~~and every restaurant that's out there is just all different cultures mixed in together some of them I'm mixing it up~~ [And there are restaurants where the foods are mixed together (fusion)] like, I think, Chinese and Mexican food is now one restaurant ~~so it's~~ [and there's one that is], like, a Cajun / Asian thing and it's incredible.

It's, it's, just a burst of food flavors and cultures all together, I think it's so beautiful.

I absolutely love it, and even right now if I go to an Asian market there are so many fruits and vegetables I have never seen in my life!

You can probably ~~pick every single day for a different recipe or a different vegetable fruit to try out for like years straight~~ [have a different recipe, different fruit, different vegetable every day for years] so you don't get bored with the same routine, the possibilities are unlimited.

Now that I have a daughter I see and notice that there are so many opportunities for kids to play.

I mean they're parks everywhere, ~~every pretty much little tiny villages or little~~ [pretty much every small village and small community has its own playground and then there's usually a bigger playground that's just a ~~communal~~ [community] service for like a district of some kind it's

[They are] really close [by]. It's all for free. They usually have classes that are free.

There are libraries that hold almost every day some kind of craft [lessons] or story time or playtime or for kids to engage [in].

They are like, community services.

Or they have pools and a lot of this stuff is free just because you live in a certain area.

It's free so it's unlimited.

Also when you go to restaurants most of the restaurants will have something for your kid to do like coloring of some kind.

They might even have a little playground area.

Some grocery stores have ~~the~~ whole rooms specifically made for kids to play in.

There are also ~~like in~~ social places that are government-run.

There are often times they have corners ~~or~~ [where] kids can play **Soula?** Probably, not the most sanitized area to be in, but it's there.

It's, an opportunity for you to pop your kid in and just kind of watch them from a [little bit of a distance] ~~a little bit~~ so it's really nice that they have that option everywhere.

I was very pleasantly surprised to see how many handicapped and people with a disability [have] places [that] are made for those people.

You can see ramps in almost every building, every business and even some of the cars and transportation is made for handicapped people to be able to use it.

I think it's absolutely amazing and it's just it's incredible how they actually build up on it as well and you can see them incorporating even more things into everyday life so everybody is ready and able to help people, all people, to participate in life.

I see kids or people with with mental disabilities working in grocery stores all the time.

I see ramps everywhere and even right now that I have a daughter, any place that I go to libraries [for] storytimes or to the little baby gym they use sign language everywhere.

So the baby is almost exposed to it from early childhood.

I think that's, that's so beautiful, and absolutely incredible.

I think every society should be doing that and implementing that as much as possible.

So, yeah, I really was pleasantly surprised.

I got a little chills right now ~~how~~ [because I am so] excited ~~I am~~ about it.

So I'm glad this is really happening.

Next, I was shocked to see how much more people are willing to share here with other people.

I'm talking about both charity and ~~both~~ just sharing ~~their life~~. [what's happening in their lives].

As far as charity goes, I've noticed that ~~it's~~ just [about] everywhere there's an opportunity to donate money.

Everywhere you go, at the cashiers, and at the grocery stores and when you check out in places they sometimes ask you if you want to donate to a Children's Hospital and stuff like that.

I think that's beautiful cuz it's, it's really a ~~collateral~~ [convenience] so you can just donate a little bit as you go and you don't have to worry about the end of the year and dumping huge sums of money somewhere.

You can just do it throughout the day.

A lot more people are paying forward to people who are behind them.

I've done that a few times too.

It's, it's, a great feeling to be able to do that for another person.

Just pay for their stuff. I think that's really cool.

People have done that ~~to~~ [for] me too and it was incredible - so that's as far as donations go.

And as far as sharing, there's ~~such~~ a thing in Russia that I don't appreciate and that is ~~them~~ [people] not wanting to tell anybody about things ~~in the~~ ~~worried~~ [that worry them because they think] that ~~it~~ [doing so] will jinx it.

And while I kind of understand it, it's also bull crap. Sorry.

I think some people United States do that too and different cultures have that too, but I haven't noticed that as much with Americans here.

That they want to share everything with everyone.

They want to talk about their day, they want to say what's good, what's bad, what they're working on.

{in the following she changes from her story to other people}

For example, when I was pregnant I had family members that didn't want to tell anybody that they were pregnant until they gave birth and even if they'd given birth, even after that, they wouldn't share it until the kid was like four months old.

That was really shocking to me because there was nothing wrong with the kid and ~~there's just~~ they were worried that [by knowing it] somebody will jinx it. {cast an evil magic spell?}

I know that there was also a stigma of miscarrying ~~being~~ [that] is something to be ashamed of so often times women won't share their pregnancy news because they're afraid that they will jinx it and it won't happen.

[They think] they won't carry through a [to] term which is total bullcrap again because I think you're supposed to be able to share both good and bad.

And in the beginning when I was dating my husband I was so worried about sharing and everything.

I kept telling him, oh my gosh, please don't share this.

He would say, "Why not? I'm just doing it with my friends and family and I just want them to be happy for me."

I'm happy and I want to share it.

And I'm like, no, no, no, please, I'm just so paranoid it's really, it's really, I'm kind of ashamed about it, so I know at some point people may be sharing too much in some cases.

But also they're willing to share their tragedy their their hardships together with their successes and happiness so that builds a stronger community around you.

People who truly understand you, know who you are, so, yeah, even now sometimes when I share certain things on my platform, a lot of ~~rotten-cultured~~ [rude] people would write to me, not everyone, [about what I said].

Hey, I'm not trying to stereotype or generalize, I promise you.

A lot of Russians actually write to me and they really appreciated ~~that for me~~ [my] sharing certain things so openly but sometimes they're writing, "Oh my gosh, why would you do that?, that's a no-no."

[Or,] "you cannot do that, don't tell anybody about that ~~a shame~~ [embarrassing] thing."

"Don't talk about your struggles." And I'm, like, why not? I want to.

I want people to feel like they're not alone because when I see other people going through something and sharing about it and if ~~it's hit~~ if it hits home for me, I feel like this is right.

This makes me feel good - I feel like I'm not alone, like, I'm not by myself here just surviving, that some things [in life] are normal, you know, so I think it's a beautiful thing to share more even though sometimes you could go overboard too.

[Next,] I was really surprised to see that people didn't care as much about clothes at all.

It is nice to look good, especially if it's a very nice quality item but it's almost impossible to find a quality item here nowadays.

Everything seems to be cheaply made, and quickly made, even from top brands.

In Russia, I remember I used to always wear really high quality products and I didn't have as much clothes but everything I had was like, really quality and it would last for years to come.

Nowadays, I'm just like that too, and I have everything just one time kind of clothing wear and I do my best now to invest into more quality versus quantity.

Now that I'm in my older years it is certainly easier to wear just a kind of baggy, just crappier clothes / ??? just easy [to] just toss it and you're done with that, just get another one.

But I do find that quality looks different and you feel different when you're wearing an expensive outfit.

So, yeah, if you ever go to Europe or to Russia you will notice how really well tailored people look.

They look rich even if they're not, but yeah in the United States, it's so much more relaxed and just kind of whatever you want.

People can afford to go in pajamas to the store, or not do their hair for a couple of days at all, or ~~do not~~ [not to use] makeup for a long time.

In Russia you would be looked [upon as] a little confused, like you're, you're sick, or something's wrong with you, if you would do that.

So it's almost a thing [that] ~~like~~ if it's very important for both men and women to look ~~apart~~ [different] and to wear makeup, do your hair for both men and women and wear clothing that's very suited and looks good.

So, so, yeah, that was, it was, interesting to see too.

[Next,] it was really nice to see that dog poop gets cleaned up most of the time.

There are usually bags, ~~like~~ [at] little stations, when you can pull out a bag and then there is a little trash can to dump the bag in there for you to clean up after your pet.

I remember in Russia ~~there was~~ probably, like, every grass patch had like [at least] one [or] a bunch of poops on it and ~~as~~ [that was] unfortunate.

But it's just, I think, not as ~~established~~ [important] to pick up after your dog there.

I hope they work on that more but maybe [it's] not, ~~right away~~ it's not gonna happen [right away].

But I do appreciate that about the United States, that opportunity to pick up after your dog is everywhere and most people do pick up after their pets, so that's, that's quite nice.

Thank you for joining.