



Elena, who was adopted from Russia (on the left with hands outstretched, palms upward), visits a Russian orphanage and tells her story about her life and college experience in the United States.

## Returning Home

LENA KNEW WHAT SHE WANTED TO DO, but wasn't sure if, when the time came, she would be able to get the words out.

This picture was taken in an orphanage in Petrozavodsk, Russia. Along with fellow English professor, Jamie Olson, I lead a 2010 language trip to Karelian State Pedagogical Academy as part of a coordinated trip between the host institution, The College of Saint Scholastica in Minnesota, and my own school, Saint Martin's University (SMU) in Washington.

Elena, an SMU English major, is a beginning Russian language student,

despite living her first six or seven years in Eastern Russia. Yes, Elena was adopted [from Russia]. And now she had returned for the first time as an adult.

On one of our after-class outings (I also attended the Russian-language class) we went to an orphanage. We had discussed this moment. Would she, could she, tell her story? She was nervous. I reiterated only what she already knew: on many levels, she would regret missing this opportunity.

So, Elena took a deep breath and began to tell her story...

When she was done, one of the Karelian Academy students, Alla, immediately said, "Oh, we *knew* you were Russian!"

No one had a dry eye.

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**YOU'RE INVITED!** We invite you to submit your photos along with a brief (approximately 200 words) description of why these images are important in your understanding of a person, place, idea, or incident from your experiences in international education. The photos could be of a simple moment on your home campus involving international students, a major event in an exotic location, or anything in between. The editors of *International Educator* will run selections on this page throughout the year. Please contact us for submission details at [elainal@nafsa.org](mailto:elainal@nafsa.org).