



Preface

Drushbmetrics – My Russian adventures

On October 15, 2001 an announcement for the First Winter School on Chemometrics (WSC) was sent to ICS-L. Receipt of this email has enriched my life immeasurably. What I knew about chemometrics up to that time was largely self-taught. I had had opportunities to learn more formally as a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University circa 1990. However, what I heard about chemometrics from students in Sarah Rutan's group sounded too much like voodoo for me to take seriously. The Winter School gave me a chance not only to partially rectify this earlier misjudgment, but also to experience Russia, which had long fascinated me. After determining that this was an opportunity that I could not pass up, I learned a few words of Russian and set out in February of 2002.

Drushbmetrics 1, as the school was also known (*drushba* meaning friendship in Russian), far exceeded my lofty expectations. Four Scandinavians, twenty five attendees from former Soviet states and one outlier gathered with some local students in Kostroma for the school. Kostroma was about a 6 h charter bus ride (provided by the organizers) north of Moscow on the banks of the Volga River. Our mornings consisted of breakfast, a lecture, and time for skiing. Early afternoons involved lunch and another lecture. All of these activities and our lodging were at the Kostromskoy Sanatorium. Evenings entailed two hands-on workshops at Kostroma State University sandwiched around dinner at a nearby Armenian Restaurant. Informal discussions on all subjects, music, and card playing continued late into the nights at the WSC bar, Scores & Loadings, back at the sanatorium. In addition to the formal program, there were numerous opportunities for informal interactions with the presenters, including a scheduled tour of Kostroma and its historically significant Ipatiev Monastery. I spent a large fraction of the time on the conference bus returning to Moscow being tutored by Paul Geladi. This is just one example of many such encounters that I have experienced or witnessed throughout the history of the Drushbmetrics program.

I boarded the plane home completely satisfied and determined to return for the Second Winter School the next March. However, the trip's impact on me was far from over. I found myself seated next to a man whose wife and children were across the aisle from us. As I recall, his oldest child was in her mid teens, but it was his youngest daughter that made the greatest impression on me. She was 5 years old at the time and completely charming. I also learned that she had just been adopted into her new family and was on her way to her new home in the US. While my wife, Laurel, and I had previously discussed the possibility of adopting internationally, the opportunity to learn about the process from someone who had just been through the experience turned out to be a tipping point. Laurel and I renewed our adoption discussions with vigor after this encounter.

About twenty brave and hearty souls (several of whom had attended WSC-1) convened in Belokurikha in March 2003 for the Second Winter

School on Chemometrics. Belokurikha is a small spa town, famous for its radon 'enriched' waters, in southern Siberia, not too far from Kazakhstan, China, and Mongolia. For me, getting to Belokurikha involved a car, three buses, two airplanes, the Moscow Metro, and one train. It took me about 43 h, and I covered about 10,000 km. However, I again found that the effort was well rewarded. Each WSC-2 session included an invited lecture and several shorter contributions, a format that has become the standard for Drushbmetrics meetings. More advanced topics were introduced this time, including validation, sampling, and QSAR. These were made possible, in part, by holding a separate Russian language beginners' course in chemometrics prior to the main meeting. This too would become the standard for future Drushbmetrics meetings. The small size of this conference created an even more relaxed and friendly tone than the previous one. There was also time for skiing and sightseeing, including the opportunity to sample the region's famous honey. I was very gratified to receive many words of encouragement and offers of help when discussing my and Laurel's increasingly serious plans to pursue an adoption from Russia.

By the time WSC-3 rolled around, Laurel and I had completed our home study and all the related paperwork for a Russian adoption. Laurel wanted to familiarize herself with Russia and the opportunity to visit both Moscow and St. Petersburg was too tempting for her to pass up. There was also an official "Accompanying Persons" program for this and subsequent conferences. We built several extra days of sightseeing and a flexible departure date onto our trip and hoped to meet an available child. We were anxiously awaiting a referral when we left home in February 2004.

Drushbmetrics-3 was renamed the Third Winter Symposium on Chemometrics to better reflect the changed nature of the meeting. Pushkinsky Gory (or Push Gory, Pushkin's Hills) is located about 400 km south of St. Petersburg. The organizers again provided a bus to the site, this time from St. Petersburg. This trip provided an opportunity to greet friends, old and new, and to see more of the country. Our accommodations, meals, and the Scores & Loadings were in the appropriately named Hotel Drushba. About forty conferees attended the technical sessions, which were held in the comfortably spacious Pushkin Center, a short walk from the hotel. To accommodate the increasing number of attendees wanting to participate, a formal poster session was held for the first time. We took time off to tour some of the nearby places associated with Alexander Pushkin, who is considered to be the founder of modern Russian literature.

Unfortunately no amount of email or number of phone calls to our adoption agency could produce a child for Laurel and me to meet on this trip. Because of this, for the first and only time, I left Russia a little disappointed. However, less than 2 days after we got home, we learned of a four-year-old girl in the Murmansk Oblast, above the arctic in northwest Russia, who had been selected for us. Several weeks later we

were on our way back to Russia to meet Alyona. We spent parts of 2 days visiting her at the orphanage, and it seemed like at least as long doing more paperwork. We spent a very enjoyable afternoon in Moscow with several of our WSC friends before heading home.

About 1 month later we were back in Murmansk for more paperwork and our court hearing. This was followed by more paperwork and a visit to the US Embassy in Moscow. Finally we headed home as a family of three. The process did not allow any time for us to introduce Alyona to our Russian friends, but we were able to fix this at WSC-4.

The Fourth Winter Symposium on Chemometrics took place in Chernogolavka, about an hour drive east of Moscow, in February 2005. The timing and choice of location was fortuitous for us. Andrey Bogomolov, who was the first person I met waiting for the WSC-1 bus to Kostroma, worked and lived in Chernogolavka at that time with his wife and two young sons. With his assistance we arranged for Alyona to attend kindergarten for a couple of days during the conference. This allowed us to comfortably take her along knowing she would have some time with other children. Alyona [1] is very proud of her Russian heritage and was excited to return to Russia. Laurel and I were thrilled to share Alyona with those who had set in motion and supported our becoming a family.

Chernogolavka is a small scientific town, and this meant a large local contingent among the approximately sixty attendees. The lectures, talks, and poster session were hosted at the Institute of Problems of Chemical Physics, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. We stayed in one of two conference hotels, and our meals and banquet were at a centrally located restaurant. What would have been a lovely week under any circumstances was made even more beautiful by 10 cm or more of fresh snow each day. This made the short walks between the venues all the more pleasant. The conference also included an excursion to the nearby cosmonaut training center at Star City, complete with full sized replicas of the Mir Space Station to explore.

The final conference of the initial Drushbametrics program was held at the Samara State Technical University Polytechnic Campus. Samara is on the Volga in the southeastern part of European Russia, about 850 km east of Moscow. It is one of several "third largest" cities in Russia. Known as Kuybyshev at the time, Samara was host to many foreign embassies during the Second World War. Our excursion around Samara included a visit to Stalin's Bunker, a ten or more story deep reinforced structure built to house the core of the Soviet government should evacuation from Moscow have become necessary. With the help of the local organizers, I was also able to deliver a small care package to an orphanage in town for a friend who had adopted from there about a year earlier.

Fresh air and a high level of comfort promoted a productive working atmosphere during the symposium. WSC-5 boasted six invited lectures, sixteen contributing talks and more than twenty posters, all of which promoted scientific discussions of high value that were continued after sessions. Many were presented in a previous special issue [2]. As one of the few to have attended all five of the Drushbametric Schools and

Symposia, I was given the opportunity to share my impressions and experiences in a presentation with many pictures on which this preface is partially based [3]. It was clear in the end that the Drushbametrics program had achieved its goal of bringing chemometrics to the broader scientific community in Russia and connecting this community with the chemometric world outside of Russia.

A new era for the Russian Chemometric Society was opened with the Sixth Winter Symposium on Chemometrics in Kazan. The symposia will now follow a biennial schedule. Kazan, on the border between east and west, is about 720 km east of Moscow and 300 km north of Samara also on the Volga. This time I shared the trip with my father, who had initiated my love of travel on a trip to Yugoslavia in 1976. Although he is well traveled, he had never been to Russia, so we spent several days sightseeing in Moscow before taking an overnight train to Kazan. Russian trains are rolling cocktail parties, which include coffee or tea available from the *provodnista* or carriage attendant, and vodka, cognac or beer and some selection of fruits, cheeses, cold cuts, salads, breads, or sweets that the passengers bring along to share with each other. Our kupemates were a young man returning to Kazan from a holiday in London and a female physician returning from a meeting in Moscow. Both spoke excellent English and made us feel welcome. In addition to the always excellent technical program, we were treated to a tour of the Kazan Kremlin including the *Kul Sharif*, the largest mosque in Europe.

More technical details about the past conferences, including many presentation files, can be found on the Drushbametrics website [4].

While you read the papers in this special issue on the Sixth Winter Symposium on Chemometrics, I encourage you to consider attending the Seventh Winter Symposium on Chemometrics, scheduled for February 2010 in the suburbs of St. Petersburg. It is unlikely that your life will be changed to the extent that mine has. However, I guarantee that the experience will be rewarding both professionally and personally. I have said many times since my trip to Kostroma that while I attended WSC-1 for the *metrics*, I keep going back for the *drushba*. I would like to thank all of my WSC friends, but especially Oxana Rodionova, Alexey Pomerantsev, Andrey Bogomolov, and Kim Esbensen, for my excellent adventures.

References

- [1] <http://chemometrics.ru/drushbametrics/wsc4/eng/attendees.php#amarks>.
- [2] Special issue: WSC-5 2006, Chemometr. Intell. Lab. Syst. 88 (1) (2007).
- [3] <http://chemometrics.ru/materials/presentations/wsc5/marks.ppt>.
- [4] <http://rcs.chph.ras.ru/drushba.htm>.

Christopher A. Marks
9212 Venetian Way, Richmond, Virginia 23229, USA
E-mail address: camarks@yahoo.com.