

Desperate to escape South Texas, Stephanie Elizondo Griest dreamed of becoming a foreign correspondent. So she headed to Russia looking for some excitement—commencing what would become a four-year, twelve-nation Communist bloc tour that shattered her preconceived notions of the “Evil Empire.” In *Around the Bloc*, Griest relates her experiences as a volunteer at a children’s shelter in Moscow, a propaganda polisher at the office of the Chinese Communist Party’s English-language mouthpiece in Beijing, and a belly dancer among the rumba queens of Havana. She falls in love with an ex-soldier who narrowly avoided radiation cleanup duties at Chernobyl, hangs out with Cuban hip-hop artists, and comes to difficult realizations about the meaning of democracy. is the absorbing story of a young journalist driven by a desire to witness the effects of Communism. Along the way, she learns the Russian mathematical equation for buying dinner-party vodka (one bottle per guest, plus an extra), stumbles upon Beijing’s underground gay scene, marches with 100,000 mothers demanding Elian Gonzalez’s return to Cuba, and gains a new appreciation for the Mexican culture she left behind.

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