Silvia Parra /Fot. César Múñoz/

In Colombia, foreigners are appreciated, respected and allowed an important space…

Silvia Parra's relationship with Colombia is a story of mutual love reflected in the commitment she made through her TV journalism and in the response of viewers that tune in to her and in the hundreds of messages of gratitude she gets for the educational and cultural value of the two segments she produces and presents on Canal Uno's Noticiero CM& newscast.

I have been very well treated in Colombia, I have never felt like a foreigner.

She was born in Venezuela, the daughter of a Colombian father and a Venezuelan mother, and although she has spent most of her life in her native country, she has been very close to Colombia since childhood. The tie became stronger when, after studying French in Canada, she came here for a few days to study the possibilities of furthering her academic education. Those few days became seven years, and she obtained her degree as a social communicator and journalist, pursued a specialization in organizational communication, and consolidated a successful career in the media.

She acknowledges that chance and Venezuelan political uncertainty played a role in her decision to settle down in Colombia, but she is happy with her decision and, although part of her heart still beats in Venezuela, together with her parents, she is convinced of the good of living in Colombia and the large collaboration she can make to the country through the social role implicit in her profession.

Silvia has creatively placed her talent and professional quality at the service of the Colombians who follow and admire her and value her fruitful journalistic work, which is responsible and far from information banalities. Beautiful and unpretentious, Silvia projects her affection and gratitude for Colombia through intelligent and novel work.

What is your nationality?

SP: I am Venezuelan, but I also have the Colombian nationality.

How long ago did you decide to come to Colombia?

In 2002, after studying French in Canada, I was on my way back to Venezuela, but in face of the political and social situation in my country, I came with my father, who is from Bogotá, for a change of air and to wait for things to calm down somewhat.

What was the reason for your trip?

SP: Initially, it was only about waiting for the crisis in Venezuela to abate; however, I inquired about the possibilities of studying. I decided to try for a semester, but ended up staying.

Was it your first time in Colombia?

SP: No. In fact, it is a family tradition to spend the December feasts in Colombia or in Mexico; I have relatives in both. On average, I used to come every other year, since my father's family is here in Colombia.

How long had you planned to stay in the country initially?

SP: Fifteen days. The idea was to spend a short vacation for the purpose of examining options to continue my studies.

Why did you decide to extend your stay?

SP: For pleasure. I felt very comfortable in Bogotá, even though I also had the alternative of studying in Mexico. From the beginning, the people's welcome made me feel at home. I have been very well treated in Colombia; I have never felt like a foreigner.

During the time you have lived here, what places have you visited and which ones have you liked? Why?

SP: I know Cartagena and Santa Marta, and Barranquilla when I was small. On weekends, I like to go to nearby towns in Boyacá, such as Villa de Leyva and Paipa. The friendliness of the

people is also perceived there, in a more tranquil atmosphere. I like Bogotá, its climate, I have everything in this city, and very close by. When I go away for a few days, I miss Bogotá. Here, there are thousands of things and plans to do.

To what did you devote your time before coming to Colombia? To what do you devote your time nowadays?

SP: Before coming to Colombia, I was studying French in Canada. Now I am a social communicator and journalist and present two segments of the Noticiero CM& newscast (Internet Correspondent and CM& Global). I publish a group of specialized institutional magazines and several in the cooperative sector. I have published two books with Noticiero CM&: Las 300 direcciones más útiles de Internet and Las 100 direcciones en Internet para niños (The 300 most useful internet addresses and The 100 internet addresses for children).

Why do you think foreigners should visit Colombia?

SP: Because it has everything. For the wealth of its cuisine, I love Colombian food; for the Colombian's human qualities, and because no foreigner - I am sure - will ever feel as warmly welcomed as he is here. People respect, appreciate, and provide an important space for the foreigner - something that does not happen in other countries. Well, and Colombia should be visited for the diversity of climates and cultures, where every region is a different world and an enriching experience.

Do you have plans any for returning to your country?

SP: No, not right now. I feel happy, fortunate, comfortable, and safe in Colombia.

What Colombian city or destination that you still do not know would you like to visit?

SP: I cannot name them all, I am anxious to get to know many places in Colombia; I have even visited them virtually. I have not been able to travel as much as I would like to, but one of my resolutions for 2010 is to discover the marvels of Colombia. The first one I want to visit is the Tayrona Park, but not on a warrior plan, not staying in a hotel, just camping and walking.

What would you recommend a foreigner to visit during a first trip to Colombia?

SP: I recommend Bogotá for the historical value of places like La Candelaria sector and for the

city's cultural offer. Also, the Caribbean region and, especially Cartagena, which is one of the most mentioned destinations abroad. I like and recommend the plan of becoming acquainted and stopping in towns during long trips, such as the journey from Bogotá to Cúcuta, which crosses marvelous, majestic landscapes like the Chicamocha Canyon.

Do you think Colombia is a world-class tourist destination? Why?

SP: Yes, totally. For the diversity there is, because there are more than enough plans to do, and for all preferences. There are places for enjoying calm activities, and cultural, fun, and adventure activities. There is a lot to do thanks to the climates, mountains, plains, water, the sea. Here, investment is done in tourist sites to preserve them and so that the people enjoy and value them.

Are you acquainted with the "Colombia, the risk is wanting to stay" campaign?

SP: Yes, I am.

Do you agree with the slogan?

SP: Yes. The phrase is intriguing. If you have never been to Colombia, you ask yourself, "What am I missing?" The campaign has an impact, and it remains in the mind of whoever listens to it. I know several Venezuelans who set foot on Colombian soil and never went back.

Do you consider yourself a foreigner in love with Colombia? Why?

SP: I consider myself a Colombian. I am the daughter of a Colombian father and a mother who loves Colombia. I was born with Colombia in my heart. It is an instilled love. People make me feel like another Colombian and, with the passing of time, I have forgotten that I am a foreigner.