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Living With Stalin's Ghost: A Fulbright Memoir of Moscow and the New Russia

Bruce C. Daniels

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Bruce C. Daniels : Living With Stalin's Ghost: A Fulbright Memoir of Moscow and the New Russia before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Living With Stalin's Ghost: A Fulbright Memoir of Moscow and the New Russia:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Adventures of the American historian in Moscow By Igor Biryukov This is an astute volume on the contemporary life in Moscow. It could have had a better title. The author has plenty of anecdotes and personal stories to tell about Russian mores. It contains some very interesting thoughts on Russian history. The first argument of the book is that Russia is a really interesting and even likeable country if you make an effort and have the patience to understand how things work. They work differently from the way things work in America. The second argument is that in order to understand how things work and why, you must understand Russian history. Not just know the facts from the textbook, but to have a 'sense', a feeling of history from the Russian perspective. It is not easy -- one must have a lot of empathy. Dr. Daniels is not a historian of Russia -- thank God! -- but a specialist on the Early American history. This is an advantage. As a native Russian, I value very low the American historians of Russia (with exception of Bruce Lincoln and James Billington). There are always competing versions of truth: the truths of Americans are not the truths of Russians. Besides, they are "whiggish" historians or "young men in a hurry" with no time for empathy. There has been an avalanche of books on Russia either with a broad cartoonish image of Russia or with very narrow agendas: what was 'Soviet subjectivity'? was a planned economy

effective or not? what was Gulag? was communism a result of Russian history or Russian DNA?, etc. Do not pay attention to the title. If you are interested in Russia or are going there, you will enjoy this book. It's a real find. It provides an interesting glimpse into life in Moscow today from the point of view of an American who has no axe to grind and who actually lived amongst the Muscovites for a year. Few years ago he came to Moscow to teach. After staying in Russia for almost a year, Bruce Daniels seemed to grasp the essence of Russia like no one else. It is really surprising. His formal training in History, the lack of agenda, personal curiosity, and love of adventure had helped him to create a rich personal account and philosophize astutely on the Russian tradition. He writes (I think it is worth quoting): "History weighs heavily on Russia. All nations have histories of triumphs and tragedies -- all peoples have memories, proverbs, tales, songs, and books; all people inherit sorrows from the past that seep into their marrow and cannot be forgotten, even though they are usually more felt than remembered. History seems to have been a bit tough on the Russians, however, and given them more sadness than it has to most people. There are no glorious epochs to be collectively remembered with unambiguous pride - no Elizabethan or Victorian Englands, no Revolutionary Americas or heroic westward movements. We know, of course, that most of Elizabethan England lived in dark squalid poverty and never saw a Shakespearian play. But history's true impact is not always measured by reality. The majority of English and Americans have collected memories that evoke vibrant, unabashedly celebratory images. Russians do not. "Russians celebrate their Czars, but all Russians know that serfdom existed here until 1861, and even after they were freed, peasant were ground to unhappy early deaths between the millstones of ignorance, disease, starvation, battle, poverty, and oppression. Many Russian take pride in the Russian Revolution and the heroic leap to industrialism, but no historical amnesia can make those events into happy times. Victory over Nazi Germany and fascism in "The Great Patriotic War" is a cause for even more pride, but here the grim impress of history is yet more obvious: one-seventh of Russia died in World War II. And finally, whatever one thinks of the Soviet Union during the Cold War era - nothing in the popular imagination can transform the last half-century into the Gay Nineties or Roaring Twenties with the rollicking, folk-cultural memory of good times. "Russia's past seems darker than that of most of the other European nations. The greatest historical triumphs felt by the most Russians have come from resisting the invasion of outsiders, and these triumphs always came with too high a price to be cause for anything but most somber of celebrations. This dark history that is so personally felt by most Russians is the key to undemanding this country in the early twenty-first century. If one adds to Russia's long historical grayness to the dazzling, immediate adrenalin of the privatization process, many of the paradoxes that greeted me in Moscow become more understandable." I highly recommend this book to all people interested in Russia and Russian history.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A new understanding of post-Communist Russia

By Alan P. Haesche

As the Fulbright Chair at Moscow State University, Bruce C. Daniels had a privileged position at Russia's most distinguished university and he drew upon his training, experience and interest to write this easily read and charming introduction to life in today's Russia. For four generations Russians lived under Communism and they are now struggling to incorporate the best of their past into a new Russia giddy with consumerism.

What are the results of one of the most remarkable transformations in history? Ambiguity, bewilderment, confusion and delight. Daniels captures the texture of daily life in Moscow a decade after this transformation began and explains the seemingly inexplicable to Americans and other westerners. As a visiting professor in Moscow, he had daily access to the thoughts of the best students in Russia and to many of the country's leading intellectuals. He used students and colleagues as guides and focus groups to help understand the complex and paradoxical world he saw unfolding. In chapters that range from humorous problems he encountered navigating this evolving social system to descriptions of student life to a discussion of present politics, Daniels describes the dynamic new country that is emerging from an old country with a remarkably tenacious past.

Part political commentary, part journalism, part comparative history, and part an observant friend, this memoir will entertain readers and give them a new understanding of post-Communist Russia.

New in shrink wrap from the original publisher. -- Part political commentary, part journalism, part comparative history, and part an observant friend, will entertain readers and give them a new understanding of post-Communist Russia.