

A WEAK AMERICAN IN RUSSIA & UKRAINE

Adventures & Misadventures
Living among the Natives



WALTER PARCHOMENKO

"A delightful read for any American who has tried to jump into the Slavic world."
—Dr. Blair Riddle, Director of the Kennan Institute in Washington, D.C.

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“Seinfeldian humor set in Russia & Ukraine”

A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine is a painfully funny collection of travel nightmares; country and culture shocks experienced by an American living and working among the natives over the past 20 years. It offers practical tips on how to cope with: Sexy young women who view foreign men as potential ATM machines and transportation out of their closed countries; herds of stampeding Slavs on city streets, in metro areas and supermarkets; angry motorists who stop for pedestrians at crosswalks only because they are bumpier than potholes; packs of howling stray dogs who don't understand English and Slavic attack pigeons.

A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine also takes readers by the hand and allows them to experience the agony of entering a collapsing post-Soviet medical system and interacting with Kafkaesque bureaucracies. And it provides foreign men, who seek Slavic brides, priceless advice that can save them from bankruptcy, jail and even confinement in a psychiatric hospital.

The result is a book that weaves comic misadventures without trivializing serious issues, including AIDS, rampant corruption and ecocide; shatters many prevailing stereotypes about Slavic men and women; and clears up numerous culturally based misunderstandings Americans typically have of Russians and Ukrainians.

Seinfeldian humor. Like the very popular TV series Seinfeld, this is fundamentally a book “about nothing”: the banal but often fascinating events that make up our human existence. Chapters titled Slavic Attack Pigeons, Fornicating Flies, Howling Stray Dogs and Mayo Heaven are just a few illustrations. A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine fully agrees with H.L. Mencken who aptly observed: “The basic fact about human existence is not that it is a tragedy, but that it is a bore. It is not so much a war as an endless standing in line.”

A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine is bound to be a source of hearty laughter for aching souls and an essential guide to help Americans and other foreigners cope with, and even enjoy, the challenges of daily life in Russia and Ukraine; and understand the many harsh post-Soviet political, economic, social and environmental realities in these countries. In all, 283 pages with 60 original illustrations and 59 short chapters.

A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine: Adventures and Misadventures Living Among the Natives Details

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From Reader Review A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine: Adventures and Misadventures Living Among the Natives for online ebook

Rachel Parrott says

Anyone who has spent an extended time intentionally living within a culture not their own will hear echos of their experiences navigating life by another's playbook. Walter Parchomenko's stories/reflections reveal aspects of Slavic culture that others would have difficulty understanding without many of their own thoughtful experiences. Insight into the Russian and Ukrainian cultures is particularly pertinent with current events and on going international relations. The dark humor and self depreciation carry much of the episodes considered in this collection.

My copy came through Goodreads First Reads.

Sheridan says

I'm very excited to read this! It's a new story for myself and I hope I will have a chance to read it :)

Morris Graham says

I found the book impossible to put down, but depressing more than funny most of the times. My chickens weren't laughing. Most of what I knew about the Soviet block came from movies. The author tries to keep the mood light most of the time while exposing Soviet and post Soviet Ukraine and Russia. He speaks with authority, having been born in a German work camp for Ukrainians and brought to America by his parents at the close of WWII. What is amazing is the author has chosen to live in Russia and Ukraine and suffer the hardships with the natives for 20 years, occasionally coming home to Washington DC. It is probably the most authoritative and insightful book on Soviet society and post Soviet society ever written. This is really a must read for any American. If nothing else, it should make you grateful to live here.

Viktoriya says

Got this book via free giveaway on Goodreads. I knew it was on the way, but didn't expect to get a personal note from the author as well as a signed copy of the book :) Extra point for that!

I was born and grew up in Ukraine. Moved to US when I was about 20, but do visit with family almost every year. After almost two decades of back-and-forth trips I can certainly identify with the author. I started reading the book knowing that almost nothing in it will surprise or shock me.

When I got this book and started flipping through the pages, almost as if by faith, it opened on a chapter about public toilets. I broke into almost uncontrollable laughter. Here is why: last year I took my husband of

almost two years (my American-born husband) to Ukraine on his very first trip to the "Soviets". After experiencing the home-made moonshine, rides in crowded trolleys or busses, after being force-fed everywhere he went, or trying to fit himself in tiny cars (my husband is 6'6), the only thing that still gives him shivers is having the need to use a public restroom in Kiev auto station. And that's after he was already "familiar" with a typical Ukrainian outhouse. Needless to say, I just had to read this chapter first and parts were read out loud to him. We both had a good laugh at how similar the experience was for him and for the author. (BTW, one more extra point to the author for mentioning my hometown Zhitomir. Kind of wish it wasn't in the chapter about public toilets, but, as the say in America "even bad publicity is good")

The book itself is a collection of short stories centered around one theme or experience. Those little chapters are independent from one another and the reader can simply jump to the topic that interests him or her the most. I read the book from A to Z and as result, some things got repetitive: average salary of \$250 is mentioned about 50 times, average size of typical apartments and it's comparison to American living rooms is also mentioned on almost every page, etc.

Nevertheless, it was a joy to read this book. Certain things are so deeply ingrained in me that I don't even realize it and it was neat to have an almost "outside" view of them: I always have to take one last look at the mirror before I leave my house, lint on my clothes drive me crazy, I have to sit on my suitcases before departing on any trip (short or long), I always shoosh my husband when he tries to whistle inside the house and he is required to take his street shoes off when he is at home. All those little things are part of me, that's "po-nashemy" (our way). I don't need to know WHY I am doing certain things, I just know that's the way :) Good or bad.

Some people who are thinking about making their first trip to Russia or Ukraine will probably change their mind after reading this book. They will probably scratch their plans to visit the "Soviets" and will go somewhere "American". If they do, they will miss out on a lot of unforgettable experiences. Yes, things are not all rosy and fragrant smelling in Ukraine or Russia. However, one thing that always shocks me and makes me want to come back year after year, is the ability of any Slav to really enjoy life. They are barely surviving on their meager salaries, they hate their living situations, they are depressed, sick, underappreciated, but everything is put aside when its time to get together with a friend or two. The simple resourcefulness and creativity that Slav women (and men) display in creating several course meals out of almost nothing with very limited warning always shocks and humbles me.

Let me give you some advise if you are contemplating your first visit to Russia or Ukraine: read this book, get your feet wet before you step on the plane, prepare for the worst, and then go and enjoy your trip. Because you will! And remember the most important thing: Moscow is NOT Russia and Kiev is NOT Ukraine. After you are done with all your "required" sightseeing, leave Moscow or Kiev, go to small, provincial towns or villages. Yes, you will not find Kremlin there, but you will find something much more precious: the true Russian or Ukrainian heart and soul!

Adam says

Much more than dark travel humor and culture shock. It's also an eye-opening, easy to read, authoritative account of the harsh realities expats can expect in Russia and Ukraine.

Lori says

I have received a copy of this book through Goodreads Firstreads. It was signed by the author and had a few words from him also, which I really appreciated. I'm sure they're the same ones he uses for everyone, but it's nice when the author takes two minutes of his time to make a small gesture for his readers.

I have to say I didn't find this book to be painfully funny as the description advertises. I was funny in places (the mayo chapter comes to mind), but more often than not the painful part was more obvious. This is not to say I didn't enjoy the book because I did. Mr. Parchomenko is definitely well informed and manages to show that in his book. I have no doubt that things can be and are as bad as what he describes, especially seen through the eyes of someone that comes from such a different culture (I know the author has Slavic roots, but the society in which he was raised is completely different). I appreciate the insight he has given me.

One thing that stands out to me is that he thoughtfully explained the reasons why Slavic men and women are as they are. It's easy to complain about things without taking time to understand what caused them to be this way (learn from the past and all that), and I am glad he didn't take the easy way.

I would have loved to have a chapter where the author explains what he does like about Russia and Ukraine. You can see glimpses here and there, but to have things made more obvious would have given a bit of balance to the book. Close to the end of the book there are two chapters (that could really have been one, they are so similar) detailing what he misses about America and the sure signs you are in Russia and Ukraine. These two chapters are followed by a third called "Thing I'll miss if I leave Russia and Ukraine". I had high hopes for this chapter, thinking it will show the reader without a doubt that there is a sun hidden under the clouds of the previous chapters. Alas, it was not meant to be. It was just a repetition of the things I had already read before: all bad, nothing good.

Due to the way it's structured (short story), the book does become repetitive after a while - some things are told and retold in quite a few chapters. That can become a bit annoying, but I can understand how it can be helpful for people that just choose random chapters rather than reading it as a whole.

For me it's a 3.5 stars book, too bad Goodreads doesn't allow a half star rating.

As a final word on this book, the author asks the reader to decide at the end if he is indeed "a weak American". I have to say, Mr. Parchomenko, you are definitely not weak, but you are for sure an American.

Luis Cortes says

This (A Weak American in Russia and Ukraine) book teleport the reader to locations that are unbeknownst to ordinary tourists and business travelers. Notably, Dr. Parchomenko's compendium of tribulations is a beautiful and remarkable journey into the reality of the common people in Russia and Ukraine.

Needless to say that each and every one of the book's chapters made my chickens laugh...,

:)

Yeah!

..., and my soul weep.

:)

Sob!

Dr. Parchomenko's crude and elegant words, as well as his realistic perception of things, people, places and situations, are an open invitation for all of us to travel to Russia, Ukraine, or anywhere else in our planet, and experience the excitement of common life and the discovery of normalcy ..., behind folklore and tourist traps.

;)

Wink, wink!

Let me tell you that "A Weak American in Russia and Ukraine" is a must for the majority of us (earthlings), who appreciate people's interaction through travel, exploration, and discovery.

Way to go, Walter!

You are a trend setter!

Kirby Hoag says

I absolutely love this book and highly recommend it! The stories in it are very down to earth, and based off of real life experiences. I continue to go back and read this book when I need a good laugh.

Robert says

A very well written and informative book. I have yet to see Russia, but with this as a handy guide I feel much more aware. The humor is great but also the experience, my Russian friends even agree on the points made, makes it ideal for anyone wanting to travel to or just get to know more about Russia and Ukraine.

Tom says

Maybe 3.5 stars, but I'm not feeling generous enough to give it four.

Written by a guy who spent twenty years living between Kyiv and Moscow, he has some pretty interesting insights into Russian/Ukrainian culture. It can be repetitive at times, as the stories are all able to be read independently, so minor details are often repeated.

Parchomenko is an entertaining enough writer, but this isn't a must-read, unless you have a special interest in Russia/Ukraine. A lot of the "unique" things he pointed out could apply to any number of developing nations, such as the lack of punctuality, strong social ties, and insistence on doing things "their way". Still interesting, but not mindblowing.

Ionut Cristian Andrei says

I absolutely love this book and highly recommend it! The stories in it are very down to earth, and based off of real life experiences. I continue to go back and read this book when I need a good laugh.

Adina says

I got a signed copy of this book via Goodreads First Reads.

Presented as a series of amusing travel horrors, the book examines life in Russia and Ukraine from the point of view of a visiting researcher from the United States who refuses to live the expat life and prefers going native. Walter Parchomenko has visited these two countries lots of times over the last 20 years, so can offer a lot of insights on how Russia and Ukraine have (or have not) changed after the fall of the Soviet regime.

I'll admit I could not help comparing his impressions with my impressions of Romania, my home country, which offers a somewhat lighter regimen of post-communist horror to the resident and the visitor. From this point of view, the book is an interesting description of how my country would have looked like if it would have chosen a different path during the post-communist transition.

Russia and Ukraine, as described by Parchomenko, are countries full of poor people ruled by a pseudo-elite of robbers and thieves safely above any law. Daily horror is guaranteed and self-imposed, from buses where people prefer to slowly suffocate rather than open a window (because the draft might put you in a hospital, and hospitals are to be avoided) to supermarkets where the cashiers expect customers to shut up and have exact change and to offices where no-one does anything other than humiliating the customers, if any become available.

I can confirm the author's descriptions of day to day horror are astute, since I am very familiar with this kind of society. This is how Romania looked like a few years ago and how it continues to be for a lot of people.

The short stories in Parchomenko are exploring issues such as the distrust of public smiling, the rudeness and small theft as ways of life, the chronic laziness, the universal abandonment of the public sphere - always seen as someone else's problem, the acceptance and huge spread of various forms of prostitution, the conscious neglect of one's health and so on.

The contrast with the American society is baffling, and it is hard to understand why people prefer to live this way - though, of course, for many people in the post-communist area any other way is difficult to imagine, let alone achieve.

I think the book is a useful read for Americans and Western Europeans who would like to work or travel in Russia and Ukraine - it gives you a good impression of what you can expect and what might get you into trouble. The book is also quite amusing, though certain jokes become repetitive after a while.

On the minus side, I would have liked a list of things that the author has liked about Russia and Ukraine - I am sure there are some, and it would be a nice companion for the large list of things he did not like.

All in all it was a very nice read, even if most of the stories sounded depressingly familiar.

Smart&Pretty says

On the one hand, every sentence of this book is true. I could never imagine that a foreigner would be capable of depicting Slavic life so well and revealing. On the other hand, the author spent 20 years living and working in Russia and Ukraine, although did not leave even ONE positive comment about these countries or their people. This is so unfair and rude. Thus, to my mind, this piece of literature seems more sad and depressing than funny.

Jessica says

I received this book free through goodreads giveaways!

This book was, unusual, and fairly different from what I normally read. And I still haven't quite decided if it makes me want to travel and explore Russia, or stay the hell away!!

A weak American in Russia and Ukraine is a series of short chapters exploring Slavic experiences and traditions as understood from the perspective of someone who lives in these countries frequently, rather than from the more regularly used position of a traveler/tourist.

I enjoyed reading about the cultural aspects of a slavic life, especially as they differ so much from our own, the short chapters were great, and meant I could read a chapter or two and not feel lost the next time I picked up the book.

Although the book felt to me somewhat repetitive, this is because the short chapters are designed so they can be read and understood independently of one another, they don't need to be read chronologically, I just happened to read them that way (call it a habit).

Overall a good way to learn about Slavic culture!

Now I just wish I could find out what salo is!!

Jasvird76 says

Interesting. Insightful. Entertaining.

Thank you so much for the Free Copy!

'A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine' is a hilarious read. No matter which chapter or what time I read this book, it always brought a smile on my face.

Yes, this book made my 'chickens laugh' but more importantly it taught me so much more. About another culture. Their traditions. Their politics. Their social life. And their insightful way of life.

Even though each chapter has new characters and a different story to tell, the author didn't fail to make the characters appear realistic. Mr. P gave each character a cultural background which instantly helped me to identify and relate with them. In fact, I had a mental picture of each character due to the thorough description.

In the beginning of the book, the author Mr. Parchomenko told us how one of his colleague found his 'misadventures' hilarious to Mr. P's horror. I can understand why now but I am so glad Mr. P wrote this book.

If I am not wrong then this book is Mr. P's first book, he has surpassed all of my expectations from this book considering this is his debut book.

I will recommend this book to my family and friends! I hope to read more of Mr. P's work in future!

Mari says

I am Ukrainian. I've been living in France for the past eleven years, though. Since I speak fluent Russian, in high school I subscribed for [optional] Russian classes, just so I could get good marks and improve my general grade (or whatever it's called in English). My teacher, I soon discovered, was a hateful cow who didn't have anything nice to say about my country, its culture, its people... Anything, really. She also criticised my [native] accent ("I think the reason why you can't speak *proper* Russian is because you're Ukrainian," she said, with her French accent of a native French woman). I had no idea why exactly she chose to teach Russian, seeing how she so openly despised both Russia and Ukraine, and I haven't figured it out to this day.

Walter Parchomenko reminds me of that teacher.

This book was written by a guy who has clearly been traumatised by his Ukrainian immigrant mother's "forcefully Ukrainianising" him, when all he wanted was to be a "normal American boy", and who now seems to be harbouring a grudge against the "Slavs" as a people in general.

(Walter, I would suggest you see a therapist ASAP.)

I am not familiar with "Seinfeldian humour" either (then again, I'm an uncultured Ukrainian swine), but upon reading this book I have decided I do not want to be.

I tried to read it with an open mind, I did. I'm not delusional, and after having lived abroad for so long I've opened my eyes on a lot of my native country's flaws. I knew I'd get angry at this book regardless, but I read it anyway because 1) I was interested in seeing a Westerner's PoV. 2) I thought it would be funny, at the very least. It wasn't. It was bitter and nasty. I feel sullied after reading it. Also, please allow me to make some adjustments to the title and implement a few corrections:

A Weak sheltered, privileged, prejudiced, entitled American pissbaby who's desperately trying to sound cultured and intelligent, but actually has no idea what he's talking about despite his Ukrainian upbringing and native associates who ~~not so successfully, it seems~~ helped him immerse himself in the Slavic culture : Adventures and Misadventures Living Among the vile-rude-alcoholic-lying-sluts-robbers-peasants-and-only-seemingly-educated-chimpanzee Natives while asserting his superiority as an American and whining at the slightest inconvenience

Some observations were spot on, I'm not going to lie, but they got eclipsed by the bullshit so quickly I didn't have time to appreciate them much.

The author tries to make us believe this book is all about dark humour and self-deprecation. It's called "**A Weak American...**" after all, implying that *he* is too weak to "survive" in Ukraine or Russia.

It's a lie.

This book is about Ukraine and Russia's failing to accommodate the slightest and pettiest of his American self's needs.

As for the "dark humour" bit... There's "humour" in "dark humour", and there's no humour in this book at all. Dark humour is about feeling horrible about yourself for laughing at a rude, offensive, politically incorrect joke, but laughing still because it's damn hilarious and you cannot help yourself, so you just sit there, feeling like laughing human trash.

I didn't laugh once while reading *A Weak American*, so dense and abundant was the bullshit the author fed me.

While criticising these countries, you'd think he'd address economical issues, the population's financial problems and such? Try to understand and explain such issues to the foreign readers in a humorous way, one that wouldn't bore them like a history lesson would?

No.

He tells us ~~a thousand and one times, approximately, in the first quarter of the book only~~ how Ukrainians (those from Kiev) live in [small, tiny, midget-sized, rotten, disgusting] apartments [with contaminated tap water and toilets that don't flush; I'm still laughing, yes] instead of houses, but forgets to specify that Ukrainians and Russians just aren't a house nation. Houses are for villages; apartments are for cities. That's the way things worked in the Soviet Union, and it hasn't even been thirty years since its fall. Give people time to adapt, you fucker.

For all its cultural interludes, in which the author tries to sound intelligent by dumping in a few dates and historical events, this book doesn't properly explore a single reason why some of the least flattering Slavic practices exist. "A lot of very young Slavic girls are in a precarious situation... so they **let themselves** be influences by Western men who pay them for sex." - rly, Walter? (Then again, this guy wrote an actual guide (that isn't satire or anything) on how to find yourself a Slavic bride without spending too much money on her. He did.))

I mean, explore? What for? Let's just mock people for being less fortunate than Parchomenko himself and his American and Western European peers, shall we.

And so on.

Even when he does criticise himself and the American population as a whole, in the end he still turns it all against the "Slavs". "70% of the American population is obese, so a trip to Ukraine or Russia would be a real cultural shock, because average meals there will look Happy Meal-sized to an American and eat-as-much-as-you-can restaurants do not exist. HOW SO, HUH, SLAVS?? I'M ASKING YOU!" (This might be slightly exaggerated. Slightly.) Later on he points out how much the American visitors are distressed by the fact that Ukrainian food is so fatty and greasy. Talk about irony.

And he'll complain about literally ANYTHING. Even when he says something nice, it'll always be followed by a criticism. Took a train to Moscow? It was "very bumpy". Visited a "beautiful garden-like" zoo? Most of its animals dropped dead a few years later, anyway, "as a result of the willfull neglect of the zoo's administrators." (A piece of info he takes out of his sleeve (as he does all the other info, though, so why am I

even surprised...) But it's Ukraine, so chances are it's 124.6% legit.) Sees children on a playground? It's a dangerous playground built during the Soviet years. Talks about cars? They're old model Russian cars. (Cause how dare people be poor and unable to afford a Japanese one, excuse you.) Takes a dump? The toilet paper is "coarse" and "brown" and not "baby soft" enough for his sensitive American asshole. Et cetera. (Sorry for the imagery, with that last example. But I am Ukrainian and therefore vulgar by birth :D)

Also, this really is an American's PoV, meaning that, despite stating otherwise on numerous occasions, he clearly doesn't try to see things from a Ukrainian/Russian's perspective and understand the reasoning behind some words or actions, and when he kinda does, it's only to come to the same conclusion every single time: "That's stupid and we Americans do it better."

It's not even well-written. The editing is non-existent (what's up with all the commas being scattered around like nobody's business?) and it's so damn repetitive, repetitive, repetitive. "To add insult to injury." is the author's favourite expression, it seems. (Probably because a trip to Ukraine or Russia can only end in one of those. Or both. Likely both, yes.) And despite his claiming to be fluent in both Russian and Ukrainian, he makes several mistakes and uses so-called typically Slavic expressions I personally have never encountered. For example, never in my life have I heard anyone use the expression "Don't make the chickens laugh." (which the author insisted on using several times in just the first quarter of the book). I even googled it to be sure - zero relevant results. "Don't make people laugh." is an actual specific expression that exists, yes. But "the chickens"? Mistranslating something, aren't we, Walter?

DNF - 25%. When I came around that chapter about stray dogs running around Kiev, attacking pedestrians and terrifying Ukrainian women at night, I knew it was enough. I don't know where this guy gets his 100% authentic stories from, but I'm sure if he went to Latin America, he'd tell you he saw El Chupacabra, cross his heart. In fact, they sat at the same table in that one stinky restaurant that served awful food, situated in that one disgusting city with its rude inhabitants and, y'know... stray dogs and shit.

Walter, I hope your mother has read this book, and I hope she is ashamed of you.

Marina says

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, that I won as a giveaway on goodreads. Being of a Slavic origin myself and having relatives whom I visit in Russia, I can relate to all that Dr. Parchomenko writes about. I do agree with the fact that Russia has a problem with bureaucracy, cleanliness of public restrooms, lack of private sphere and decaying infrastructure, however I have noticed that the author often speaks of the deep slavic soul and wisdom and strength of the Slavic people. So he is not only mentioning the negatives sides of the Slavic society. I do understand why he also names them as Slavs, simply because he tries to avoid repeating Russians and Ukrainians all the time.

There is some repetition between the different chapters, but I assume the author expects the chapters to be read separately and not in a particular order, which is precisely how I read it. Dr. Parchomenko has a favourite expression: "To add insult to injury" :). At some point I was tempted to count the times he mentions it, but then again who does not have a favourite word that he/she repeats without knowing. :) All in all, it was a light enjoyable humoristic read. For those who wrote a harsh critic, you probably were expecting a different kind of literature. I expected exactly this: The "Seinfeld" kind, that makes you laugh and go: "Yes exactly! why did'n I think of saying it this way!" I do recommend the book to all who have a little Slavic soul inside of them or those who want to get to know it at some point.

Zuzka says

Fun and informative read. However, the chapters included a lot of repetition. Could be also somewhat offensive for Eastern European readers, even though I have to admit that the author was EXACTLY ON POINT. :)

John says

This is a bomb of a book, a chain of petty whines and groans about living abroad. Dr. Parchomenko starts by referencing his family's Ukrainian origins as his motivation for exploring Ukraine (and Russia). Very respectable. But for the remainder he holds all the people of these countries at arm's length, referring to them collectively as "Slavs." Only occasionally are his analyses of "Slavic behavior" supported by references to a particular "Slavic man" or "Slavic woman;" most without names or personal attributes.

Secondly, he finds no joy. He feels offended by cashiers who sit instead of stand; put-off by the prospect of using his legs to get anywhere; disgusted by common city fauna such as pigeons and strays; and above all: he considers himself a martyr for having abandoned his comfortable couch in America. I've lived in Kyiv for 8 months (not nearly his 20 years, which he mentioned no shortage of times), and I can testify that the sun shines here as anywhere else, and Kyivans do find ample opportunities to enjoy this place. The point of traveling long-term is to cultivate appreciation for at least some of the differences, and this author utterly failed to do that.

If you want the travelogue of a man who wishes he'd never left home, this is the one. Otherwise, find another read.

Aurora says

Name of Book: A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine; Adventures & Misadventures Living among the Natives

ISBN: 978-0-578-10042-5

Publisher: Createspace

Year it was published: 2012

Overall theme:

"In many respects this is a book about nothing. More specifically, it's about the trivial, banal and yet often fascinating events of daily existence which are aggravated greatly by living in a foreign, largely non-English speaking culture." (xiii)

"In addition to providing aching souls with a bit of laughter, it is my hope that my stories will help clear up some important culturally based misunderstandings Americans typically have of Slavs and shed light on their

psychology and behavior, in particular." (xiii)

Author: Walter Parchomenko

About the Author:
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genre
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member since
March 2012

Walter Parchomenko, a distinguished college professor and civil servant in Washington, D.C. for more than 25 years, was born in a German refugee camp. He is the son of Ukrainian peasants, World War II refugees deported from their war-torn Ukrainian village to forced labor in Germany. After a grueling crossing of the Atlantic in the storage of an ocean liner packed with Slavic refugees, he entered the US (just 12 months old at the time) through Ellis Island's newly reopened reception center. Parchomenko grew up in snowy Rochester, New York and eventually fled his Slavic mother's strict regime, KGB-like Gulag to simultaneously work and attend graduate school in Washington. He directed a U.S. government, graduate school program in Russian and Eurasian Studies in Washington for 16 years. Over the past 20 years, he has spent a great deal of time living and working among the natives in Russia and Ukraine. Parchomenko's writings have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Christian Science Monitor, Kyiv Post, and numerous other publications. A Georgetown University Ph.D., and Fulbright Scholar, he currently divides his time between Washington, D.C. and Kyiv, Ukraine, where he works as a consultant and advocate for disabled rights groups. Readers' comments are welcome and may be sent to walter@aweakamerican.com.

Summary:

A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine is a painfully funny collection of travel nightmares; country and culture shocks experienced by an American living and working among the natives over the past 20 years. It offers practical tips on how to cope with: Sexy young women who view foreign men as potential ATM machines and transportation out of their closed countries; herds of stampeding Slavs on city streets, in metro areas and supermarkets; angry motorists who stop for pedestrians at crosswalks only because they are bumpier than potholes; packs of howling stray dogs who don't understand English and Slavic attack pigeons.

A Weak American in Russia & Ukraine also takes readers by the hand and allows them to experience the agony of entering a collapsing post-Soviet medical system and interacting with Kafkaesque bureaucracies. And it provides foreign men, who seek Slavic brides, priceless advice that can save them from bankruptcy,

jail and even confinement in a psychiatric hospital.

The result is a book that weaves comic misadventures without trivializing serious issues, including AIDS, rampant corruption and ecocide; shatters many prevailing stereotypes about Slavic men and women; and clears up numerous culturally based misunderstandings Americans typically have of Russians and Ukrainians.

1. Coming to America

One sentence summary:

Description of his childhood and personal gulag his mother put him through.

2. The Post Soviet System

One sentence summary:

Description of Russia and Ukraine post 1980s when Communism broke down.

8. The Smiling American

One sentence summary:

Description of how Russians perceive when Americans smile at them as well as when they ask how they are doing.

9. The Generously Proportioned American

One sentence summary:

Description of the type of meals one finds in Ukraine and Russia as well as slight differences between a Russian dinner and American one

10. Slavic Public Toilets

One sentence summary:

Description of how public toilets are like in Ukraine and Russia, and how they differ from American toilets.

24. My Slavic Mega-Market

One sentence summary:

Description of the current shopping experience in Russia as well as how it was in the past.

26. Sexpats on the Post-Soviet Playground

One sentence summary:

Description of what some of the Russian women do to take advantage of the foreign men

27. Khytrist, a Key to understanding Slavic Women

One sentence summary:

Description of what women do and the lengths they go to attract foreign men

28. Looking for Love in all the Wrong Places

One sentence summary:

The one where he meets Bill and warns him about Slavic women and some diseases, but Bill doesn't believe him.

29. My Lovely Russian Rose

One sentence summary:

Description and consequences of a middle-aged man falling in love with a Russian woman and what can happen.

31. In defense of Slavic Women

One sentence summary:

Description of the hardships that Slavic women face while living in Russia and Ukraine as well as a personal example of Bill.

32. In Defense of Slavic Men

One sentence summary:

Description of the hardships that Slavic men have to face while living in Russia or Ukraine

33. Po-nashemu- "It's a Slavic Thing, you Wouldn't understand."

One sentence summary:

Description of some of Slavic traditions that the author has encountered.

39. Orthopedic Consequences of Slavic Foot Candy

One sentence summary:

Description of how Russian women view shoes and type of shoes they wear as well as effects of stilettos for long term health.

40. A Proud tradition of stealing and cheating

One sentence summary:

Description of Slavic views on cheating, that's it done everywhere vs American view of it as wrong and plagiarism.

44. In Defense of Ronald McDonald

One sentence summary:

Description of what Slavic people think of Ronald McDonald restaurants.

50. Slavic Humor

One sentence summary:

Description of some jokes and anecdotes that Slavs may find funny.

51. Slavic superstitions and my tortured childhood

One sentence summary:

Description of some superstitions as well as reasons behind them.

52. Slavic Fear of cold drinks and deadly drafts

One sentence summary:

Description of ice cubes and Slavic attitudes to them.

56. Things I miss about America

One sentence summary:

Things he misses while he's living in Russia or Ukraine

57. Things I'll Miss if Leave Ukraine and Russia

One sentence summary:

What he'll miss about Ukraine and Russia when he'll go back to America

59. Coming home from the insane asylum

One sentence summary:

Some lessons he learned while living in Ukraine and Russia as well as coming back to America

Personal opinion:

I grew up with some of the stuff, so he's pretty dead on and accurate with what I heard from my parents. I mentioned some of the things I learned from the book to them and they supported what he wrote. If I should write a story that takes place in Russia or Ukraine, I will of course use this book to make my characters sound realistic.

Quick notes: I would like to thank the author for the opportunity to read and review the book.

5 out of 5

(0: Stay away unless a masochist 1: Good for insomnia 2: Horrible but readable; 3: Readable and quickly forgettable, 4: Good, enjoyable 5: Buy it, keep it and never let it go.)

<http://sveta-randomblog.blogspot.com/...>
