



All the Clean Ones Are Married: And Other Everyday Calamities in Moscow

Lori Cidylo

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In 1991, Lori Cidylo shocked her Ukrainian Polish-born parents when she told them she was leaving her reporter's job in upstate New York to live and work in the rapidly dissolving Soviet Union. For the next six years she lived on a shoestring budget in Moscow, in tiny, run-down apartments, coping with the daily calamities of life in Russia. Fluent in Russian, she rode public transportation, did her own shopping and cooking, and shared the typical Musovite's life—unlike most Westerners who were sequestered in heavily guarded compounds reserved for diplomats and journalists. As the country experienced its most dramatic transformation since the Bolshevik Revolution, she realized she had stepped into a fantastical and absurd adventure.

Cidylo's wry, insightful account of what it was like for an American woman living in Russia is a dramatic tale full of insouciant laughter, in which vividness and immediacy shine on every page. With the sharp eye of an acute observer, she captures both the momentous events and the everyday trivia: how do Russians address one another now that the familiar "comrade" is passé; or, how do you find your way home in a city where the streets keep getting new names? As Russia even now continues to struggle with the Cold War's aftermath, Cidylo gives a delightful surprising, warmly human view of post-Soviet life.

All the Clean Ones Are Married: And Other Everyday Calamities in Moscow Details

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Barbara says

In her memoir, "All the Clean Ones are Married: And Other Everyday Calamities in Moscow", journalist Lori Cidylo recounts her years living in Moscow, from 1991-1997. Born to Ukrainian-American parents, the author decides to take on a journalist/translator job and during her time in Moscow, she encounters a very different society going through a different and sometimes dangerous transition period.

This book was really informative and will absolutely teach readers things that they've never considered about Russia during this time frame. For example, the author's descriptions of her ordeal just to simply buy a washing machine, and the confusion over street names are just small examples of things that I never would have considered. Furthermore, the author does a great job at describing in detail the culture and attitudes of society at that time, while also explaining the history behind these differences. This book is one of the more informative memoirs that I have read, which I appreciated.

On the other hand, despite being informative and filled with interesting facts, the overall structure of this book was disorganized and this confusing lack of a timeline took away from its readability. The book is not organized in a linear or chronological structure, and at times it was hard to tell if something was happening at the beginning of her time in Moscow (1991) or at the end (1997).

Overall, this book is well written and interesting and despite some editing/organizational issues, it is well worth the read for anyone looking for their next non-fiction book.

Monica says

Maybe 3 1/2 stars. I liked it. Bummed when I finished.

Denise says

What a great book! Lori, an American girl of Ukrainian descent, shocks her parents with the news, that she has taken a newspaper job in Moscow. The year is 1991. They try to dissuade her since they lived under Communist rule. Just a couple of weeks after Lori arrives, communism falls and the Soviet Union no longer exists. This is the story of her five years in the capital. From her hilarious attempts at finding a washing machine to her insights during different government overthrows while literally under fire, to her thoughts on dating Russian men and her sadness for Russian lack of feelings in regards to public safety, this book captivates the reader. I wonder if she has returned to visit during Putin's years and would love to read about her further exploits.

I received this book from a Goodreads giveaway.

Catherine says

Good read and, at times, very funny. Loved the washing machine story. Cidylo is a great storyteller.

Dr Penner says

Couldn't really put this one down...It is a good thing that Cidylo is an optimist because Russia in the early 90's was a scary and depressing place. The bravery it takes to move to leave life behind and move to a new city can make for a pretty good story. When that city is early 90's Russia, it makes for several good stories. Told over the span of the seven years that Cidylo lived there, All The Clean Ones Are Married is a fascinating book and well worth the read.

Kate says

While many of the stories were funny little cultural misunderstanding and mishaps, it was jarring and sobering to read about some of the truly shocking conditions in the Russia of the mid nineties.

Nada Loughead says

An look at life in Moscow during the change from communism to democracy (sic). As an American journalist working and living in Russia, the insight into daily life is an interesting read. The only parts I found myself skipping were the long political explanations - just not my thing. Won this book on Goodreads. <http://www.bookcrossing.com/journal/1...>

Nancy says

I won this in a Goodreads giveaway.
I enjoyed reading this book. Quite an eye opener on life in Russia. Made me very thankful that I was not born there.

Tina says

I read this book after my second trip to Russia. I loved it. It was very funny and insightful into what everyday life was like in Russia at the time.

Dennis C. says

Cidylo's style is light and funny, but at times it's a bit too corny. I liked her ability to take everyday interactions with people and make connections with the changing historical/ political dynamics.

Liralen says

I sat on the couch, trying to absorb what was happening on the screen in front of me. Was it possible that I was actually watching live television coverage of people killing one another? (248)

At 25, Cidylo—the daughter of Polish-Ukrainian immigrant parents—decided to move to Moscow. Her parents were horrified, but Cidylo, who had studied Russian, was determined. Off she went, with job offer in hand and plans to seek freelance writing work with newspapers Stateside.

Two weeks after she got to Moscow, the Soviet Union collapsed.

Cidylo slips in and out of time throughout the book, here describing what was going on in Moscow in her experience in the early 90s and there describing what it's like now (though 'now', in the context of the book, means ~2001). She stayed for about six years, learning to roll with the changes and adapt as need be. (Me, I would have been gone the moment a cockroach fell off the ceiling and landed in my hair(!), but, well. Her version is of course more interesting for the fact that she stayed.) I struggled with the time frame in places, because it's not at all the linear sort of narrative one often gets from memoir...and yet it's at the end that this non-linear choice makes the most sense. What better place to put the most dramatic, overwhelming, unexpected events of the book than as a climactic end?

It's truly a foreign world to me, the Moscow Cidylo describes. Currency is constantly in flux, items like washing machines are nigh on impossible to find, and there's a strange dichotomy between emphasis on motherhood and cheapness of human life. *Several other well-intentioned friends gave me the same advice [to have a child whether or not she was married]. I tried to explain that I didn't want children just then; I wanted to get married first. When I saw the bewilderment in their eyes, I realized that in Russia, whether a woman wants to become a mother is irrelevant. "Women who don't have children are selfish," the popular saying goes. (213)* For a woman, motherhood was the ultimate goal—and yet Cidylo also tells of the lack of care drivers had for pedestrians, of almost getting run over multiple times by drivers who couldn't have cared less, and of a police officer casually kicking (in the torso, in the head) a man who lay for hours in the street, dying, after being hit by a car. A foreign world, and so often a hostile one.

Yet she stayed. She carved out a space for herself and, for at least those years, stayed. Something about life there seemed right to her—for a journalist, it must have been an absolutely fascinating time and place to be working—and for all that she talks about the difficulties, she also finds beauty in little things, like the older woman who helps her turn her ugly apartment into a home. Such interesting clashes between beauty and ugliness, old culture and new, inside perspective and outside.

Bits and bobs:

I had just turned on my computer and was still trying to get used to the sight of a Cyrillic keyboard when a tall, wiry young man approached my desk. He smiled shyly, revealing two dimples. "You must be Lori," he said. "My name's Sasha. I'm a translator here. So what do you think of this crazy country?" I laughed, but I soon realized that Sasha wasn't being facetious. Two weeks after I arrived, the Soviet Union collapsed. (21)

Imagine a presidential candidate stepping up to the rostrum and promising voters that he won't send anyone to a labor camp. That's exactly what Gennadi Zyuganov, the Communist candidate, told his constituents when he ran for office in 2000. (37–38)

When I finally found my apartment, I went back outside and took a good look at the building. There had to be something distinctive about it. When I looked carefully, I saw that someone had smashed a hole in the plastic panel on the front door. But then I noticed that the doors of three of the other buildings had holes too. So I memorized the shape of the hole--it looked a little like a horse's hoof--and made a mental note that it was just about the doorknob. And that was how I learned to recognize my building, by looking for the horse's hoof. (52)

Kate says

This book is a series of episodes during the author's tenure in Russia in the early 1990s. It was interesting to read about this very difficult time in Russian history, and it filled a gap in my history lessons on Russia. I would recommend for those who are interested in Russia. Print editing was noticeably a bit careless.

Kate Papenberg says

Fantastic read that proves fact is better than fiction!

Olive (abookolive) says

This is a short, charming, and insightful book outlining an American journalist's time spent living in Moscow in the 1990s. Russian culture is what is mainly discussed, but the political and economic climate is also touched upon - rightly so considering the climate during that time period.

I loved Lori Cidylo's anecdotes, which were very often funny but also very telling about certain aspects of the Russian character and of life in Russia. As someone who has spent some time in Russia in more recent years, I often smiled in agreement when reading about some stranger aspects of Russian culture. What I appreciated most about these acknowledgements about the curious elements of Russian life was that she made an effort to explain why and how they came about. Thus, through reading the book you not only learn how the Russians were during this time, but how they got that way.

This is a fast, but very fun read that I would highly recommend for anyone who is fascinated by the Russians.

Devyn says

I received this book from Goodreads.

I love to read books about people's experiences while traveling. I feel it gives me a preview of the land

before I travel there myself someday. (Hopefully!)

This book is no exception. It tells a unique perspective of a American woman in Russia during the 1990s.

Most of it anyway...

What immediately drew me to this book while reading it is that Lori Cidylo didn't plan and plot and have everything figured out when she went to Russia. She pretty well just crossed her fingers and took the plunge.

It proved a rather rough start, but I think she wouldn't have lived the full Russian adventure if she hadn't. I

loved reading about all the shocking differences and absurdities. Wrinkle-less money, hygiene, and many other things had me so appalled that in the end I just had to laugh.

Reading this book gave credibility to my initial assumption that Russia goes from one extreme to the next.

Either too much or nothing.
