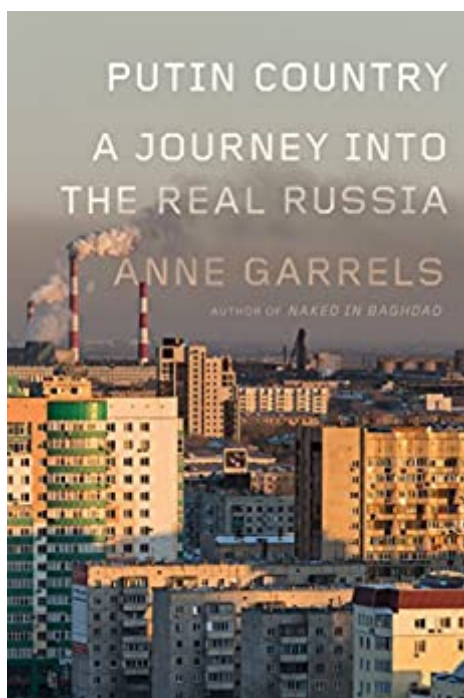


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Putin Country: A Journey Into The Real Russia



Synopsis

Short-listed for the Pushkin House Russian Book Prize More than twenty years ago, the NPR correspondent Anne Garrels first visited Chelyabinsk, a gritty military-industrial center a thousand miles east of Moscow. The longtime home of the Soviet nuclear program, the Chelyabinsk region contained beautiful lakes, shuttered factories, mysterious closed cities, and some of the most polluted places on earth. Garrels's goal was to chart the aftershocks of the U.S.S.R.'s collapse by traveling to Russia's heartland. Returning again and again, Garrels found that the area's new freedoms and opportunities were exciting but also traumatic. As the economic collapse of the early 1990s abated, the city of Chelyabinsk became richer and more cosmopolitan, even as official corruption and intolerance for minorities grew more entrenched. Sushi restaurants proliferated; so did shakedowns. In the neighboring countryside, villages crumbled into the ground. Far from the glitz of Moscow, the people of Chelyabinsk were working out their country's destiny, person by person. In Putin Country, Garrels crafts an intimate portrait of Middle Russia. We meet upwardly mobile professionals, impassioned activists who champion the rights of orphans and disabled children, and ostentatious mafiosi. We discover surprising subcultures, such as a vibrant underground gay community and a circle of determined Protestant evangelicals. And we watch doctors and teachers trying to cope with inescapable payoffs and institutionalized negligence. As Vladimir Putin tightens his grip on power and war in Ukraine leads to Western sanctions and a lower standard of living, the local population mingles belligerent nationalism with a deep ambivalence about their country's direction. Through it all, Garrels sympathetically charts an ongoing identity crisis. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union, what is Russia? What kind of pride and cohesion can it offer? Drawing on close friendships sustained over many years, Garrels explains why Putin commands the loyalty of so many Russians, even those who decry the abuses of power they regularly encounter. Correcting the misconceptions of Putin's supporters and critics alike, Garrels's portrait of Russia's silent majority is both essential and engaging reading at a time when cold war tensions are resurgent.

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Customer Reviews

The writing of Anne Garrels is riveting! Her experiences, the exposure to so many over an extended period of time portrays a people choking on what they see around them, yet are unable to correct the corruption at every level of society. Anne's graphic conveyance of the medical profession, the sad consequences of being born less than normal, the unbelievable exposure to radiation.

Awareness of the deaths of untold innocents is staggering to understand. Anne coming back home to Norfolk, CT brings into perspective what we take for granted as Anne conveys the real side of America. The conveniences we all take for granted, will they continue for ever?

Should be read by anyone who thinks they understand Putin and the way Russia is being run or by those who know little about that country and regime. I was particularly struck by the feelings of paranoia and apathy of the Russian citizens. Anne Garrels has long been a valid and insightful reporter concerned with facts. She verifies those qualities in this book. Very reader friendly without being "dumbed down". Excellent personal stories to illustrate her points made her observations and opinions all the more valid. Excellent for serious high school students as well as intelligent, information-seeking adults. Avid Reader

Given the authors's perspective being in and out of the country over a number a years, this book seems to provide the informed commentary that it purports to on the effect of Putinism on the

everyday lives of Russians in the hinterlands. A great complement to this is Steven Lee Myers "The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin" which concentrates on the internal struggles within the government from 2000 to the present (2015).

Anne Garrels immersed herself into the culture and lives of people who became her friends in Chelyabinsk. It is different than what I saw on my visits last month to Moscow and St. Petersburg. The lives of the average Russian citizen is difficult and grim. They are undergoing some positive changes and we can only hope and pray that a more positive direction can be found.

Well written and very informative. Gave me an understanding of how Russians view the United States and Putin. Time well spent learning what is seldom if ever covered on television.

Fascinating reporting from an interesting perspective: a 20 plus friendship with a Siberian city and how it has changed from the fall of the Soviet Union to today, focusing on the impact on the people in the town.

Comparable to Hedrick Smith's "The Russians" as a look at the current status of a country with a long and tortured history. For those interested see also Bruce Lincoln's books Russian history

I found this book to be very informative. Garrels picked Chelyabinsk, near the Ural Mountains in central Russia as a place to collect stories about contemporary Russians, and she has produced a compelling portrait. This is a good read for anyone who wants to get an idea about the lives of Russian citizens in various walks of life.

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