

TWO
LIVES,
ONE
RUSSIA



NICHOLAS
DANILOFF

Nicholas Daniloff

*Two Lives,
≈ One Russia*



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Two Lives, One Russia

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The Kremlin and the Cosmos

Two Lives, One Russia

*For my friends in Moscow, Soviet and American,
diggers of truth, preservers of memory,
and, most of all,
for Ruth*

The diplomatic corps and Westerners in general have always been considered by this government, with its Byzantine spirit, and by Russia as a whole, as malevolent and jealous spies.

— The Marquis de Custine,
Russia in 1839

Acknowledgments

Without the help of friends, acquaintances, and officials in both the Soviet Union and the United States, this book would not have been written. Unfortunately, as a result of my arrest by the KGB, I was never able to say good-bye to many people in Moscow, let alone offer them my thanks. I hope they will understand.

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Needless to say, this book is much different from the one I started writing before my arrest in Moscow on August 30, 1986. It has acquired new dimensions, and I would like to thank scores of officials in Washington and friends and colleagues in the United States for helping during our family crisis and in the succeeding months. My thanks go especially to President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz; to the members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives; to all the officials in the White House, National Security Council, State Department, and Justice Department who were involved in my case. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Armand Hammer for always being there in times of Soviet-American crises. My thanks also go to Senator Edward M. Kennedy as well as to Robert Abrams, Ray Benson, Phil Brown, Richard Combs, Greg Craig, Roger Daley, John Evans, Bill Freeman, Gregory Guroff, Bernadine Jocelyn, Bernard Kalb, Curt Kamman, Arthur Hartman, Elizabeth Keefer, David Major, John Martin, Jack Matlock, Bob and Elise Ober,

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meticulous editing of every paragraph, line, and word. The toughest editor of all turned out to be Ruth, who saved the enterprise more than once. How can I ever thank her enough?

To all my unnamed friends in Moscow, whom I think of often but silently, I hope the day will come when I shall be able to recognize you with joy rather than trepidation.

Nicholas Daniloff
Chester, Vermont, 1988

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Photographs not otherwise credited are from the author's collection.

One

IT ALL BEGAN quietly enough. On Sunday morning, August 24, 1986, my wife, Ruth, and I were sitting at the kitchen table in our apartment in Moscow, drinking coffee, listening to the eight o'clock broadcast of the BBC. It looked like a fine day, and we had opened the door to the balcony, letting in the warming air and the sound of traffic on Leninsky Prospekt, six floors below.

I fiddled with the dial on the short-wave radio, trying to get the clipped British voice to come in more clearly. A moment later, I heard the announcer say something about the arrest, in New York, of a Soviet employee of the United Nations on charges of espionage. He gave the man's name, but I missed it because Zeus, our brown and white fox terrier, was barking.

The report from New York did set off a small alarm. I recalled that when the United States had arrested Soviet citizens before, the Soviet Union had quickly retaliated by arresting U.S. citizens. I also knew the KGB's practice of moving against a correspondent, scholar, or businessman in the last days of an assignment, usually once the successor was in place. That way the KGB could strike without precipitating a round of reprisals. Diplomat fallout

was kept to a minimum, and the new man in Moscow was suitably intimidated.

I knew all this, but the story of the arrest and its possible implications quickly receded; there were so many last-minute matters to deal with. After five years in Moscow as bureau chief of *U.S. News and World Report*, I was finally returning home. In another week — once I could pack everything and help get my replacement, Jeff Trimble, settled — Ruth and I would leave for three weeks of travel through the Soviet Union. I was doing research on the life of my great-great-grandfather, and we wanted to see for ourselves more of the places where he had lived so many years earlier. After the trip, we would return to Moscow, take the overnight train to Finland, and fly from there to the States. In the fall we would move to Vermont, where I planned to take a year off and write a book about my ancestor.

We were looking forward to our return to America, yet we hated to leave the Soviet Union. Moscow had been home for Ruth and me and for our two children, twenty-three-year-old Miranda — Mandy — and sixteen-year-old Caleb, who were both about to fly back directly after spending the summer with us. We had made many Soviet friends, and I wondered whether we would ever see them again. I would also miss the excitement of working in the capital of the other great superpower, and I doubted that I would ever find another assignment as rewarding — or as tough. The years in Moscow had also been good professionally for Ruth, a free-lance journalist, who had written many articles for American magazines.

I spent that day at the office, just one floor up from our apartment, clearing out my desk, doing my final expense account, and explaining to Jeff the ins and outs of running a one-man news operation in a country where everything takes twice as long to do as elsewhere. Finally, around 9:00 P.M., I went back down to the apartment and collapsed on my bed, exhausted from the long day.

A few minutes later the telephone rang. Caleb answered and then handed me the receiver.

"Hello, this is Frunze." The voice was familiar: it was Misha. At home, we called him "Misha from Frunze," to distinguish him from half a dozen other Mishas we knew. Few Soviets identify themselves on the telephone by their family names, as that would make it too easy for the KGB's eavesdropping devices. In fact, Soviet acquaintances rarely identify themselves at all, leaving you to guess who is at the other end of the line.

"Where are you?" I asked. I was pleased to hear from Misha, for I wanted to say good-bye and give him some books he had asked for.

"I'm at the airport, on my way back to Frunze. But I'll be back next weekend and I'd like to see you."

"Fine," I replied, relieved that I did not have to go out that evening. "Give me a call. I've got something for you."

As it turned out, Misha had something for me, too.



I had first met Misha — Mikhail Luzin — more than four years earlier, in March 1982, in a restaurant in Frunze. I was on assignment to the Muslim republic of Kirghizia, in Soviet Central Asia, with my colleague Jim Gallagher of the *Chicago Tribune*. The region was of particular interest to journalists because of its high birth rate; its population threatened to outnumber that of European Russia by the year 2000. Also, Kirghizia was close to Afghanistan, and we hoped to discover how the Muslim population in the Soviet Union viewed the guerrilla war, then in its third year.

We were staying at the Ala-Too Hotel, a pretentious, unimaginative place. The evening of our arrival, we went down for a late dinner. The dining room was like most Soviet restaurants that cater to foreigners. First to be seated in the cavernous room were the overseas visitors, with their hard currency. The rest of

the diners that evening appeared to be townspeople, and I was sure they had waited in line for hours for the chance to eat a better-than-average meal, dance to the deafening band, and watch or perhaps even talk to foreigners.

As we were finishing our meal, a tall young man at the next table left his companions and approached us. His features were unmistakably Russian: the high, broad cheekbones, the slightly ruddy complexion, the blond hair. His teeth were unusually white and straight; Soviet dentistry is decades behind that in the United States.

“May I join you? I heard you speaking English.” Offering his hand, he introduced himself: “My name is Misha.”

He was not dressed in the flashy clothes preferred by black marketeers. Nor did he have the overconfident furtiveness typical of the KGB types who hang around hotels frequented by foreigners. Still, Jim and I were cautious, because in the Soviet Union chance meetings with strangers are always suspect. At the American embassy in Moscow, in fact, suspicion becomes outright paranoia. The embassy’s security officers automatically assume that every Soviet who associates with a foreigner is a potential KGB agent; diplomats are instructed to venture out only in pairs and to report each contact with a citizen. But correspondents are in a different position. To cover the Soviet Union they must take risks; they cannot rely solely on official briefings and newspaper reports. They must dig below the surface, develop their own, unofficial sources wherever possible, and immerse themselves in Soviet life.

Jim and I exchanged a glance and a nod. Misha looked okay, so we invited him to sit down. We ordered a bottle of champagne — a regular part of Soviet social life, along with cognac and vodka. As we sipped our drinks, Misha told us he was a fourth-year student in the philological department of Frunze University. Like so many young Soviets who are deprived of information about the West, he was immensely curious about the United States, and American literature in particular. He longed