

Three Sisters at the Revolution: An Eyewitness Account of How America's Export of Overwhelming Freedoms Helped Produce the Russia of Today

Jeffrey Manber



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Imagine a world of too much freedom.

Imagine having too many choices.

Imagine foreign languages flooding the television. Imagine gangsters being the only ones making good money. Imagine your parents losing all of their life savings in a matter of weeks. Imagine your children enamored with another country and dreaming of leaving. Imagine your nation imploding from being a world leader to a supplicant for aid in a matter of a few short years. And imagine being judged solely by your ethnicity and religion.

And finally, imagine how you and your family would react to this bewildering life.

Because of an invitation to witness from Moscow the last rocket launch of the 1980s to the Russian space station, Jeffrey Manber was an eyewitness to this extraordinary moment in time and tells the story of how three extraordinary women grappled to survive.

"Three Sisters at the Revolution" is a unique memoir that reveals the spiritual chaos swirling around everyday Russians as the Soviet Union unleashed dramatic and desperate reforms. Everyone was impacted, including the author, who takes a surprising spiritual journey as he comes to understand his own Jewish roots.

Jeffrey meets his soon-to-guide and friend Olga in a nightclub for Jewish mafia. Olga herself is part Jewish but wears a large silver cross and believes in fortune-tellers and the Russian Orthodox Church. Most of the early businessmen scorned by the everyday citizens, including Olga's boss Boris, are Jewish. And to make matters even more troubling, while Europeans strove to do business with the newly capitalistic Soviet marketplace, the major American export at the time seemed to be American evangelists, including one Billy of Tallahassee, Florida, who preaches a mix of Jesus and Elvis to bewildered Muscovites.

Olga's second 'sister' Little Irena finds refuge working for the Russian nationalists supported by the Russian Orthodox Church. And the third 'sister' of Olga, who Jeffrey refers to as Crazy Irena, is a Christian Chechen who makes a living dancing in a club as a nun.

Like so many others at the time, Jeffrey believed that America could transform Russia into a European version of ourselves. He thought total religious freedom to be without question a wonderful opportunity. But from his very first visit, in December of 1989, he came to understand that we were overwhelming the Russians with our values and beliefs.

In the final chapters, Olga and her sisters are no longer enamored of America. Readers will sympathize with Olga when she wearily concludes, "Russian freedoms are different than Americas, yes?"

"Three Sisters of the Revolution" is a unique insight into a Russia few policy makers ever witnessed. The stories leave little doubt that the Russia of Vladimir Putin has its roots in these troubled times, and we, as a society, could have supported them better.

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