



My Estonia. Passport Forgery, Meat Jelly Eaters, And Other Stories

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Some people have said this book is romantic and maybe it is: a young lost American college grad falls in love with an intriguing European journalist and embarks on a journey that restores his faith in himself and the world. Sure, it is romantic. But it was never easy. A foreigner arrives in the middle of a dark winter and must survive in Estonia, the "least fortunate Scandinavian country," a land where people eat blood sausage and jellied meat, drink warm bread, and are always on time; a place where every family is haunted by the past and is struggling to catch up to the present. Over the course of one year, so much happens in this tiny northern land that it stops being foreign. Estonia and the college grad turned journalist become intimately acquainted. Inseparable. And in the end, he comes to love it, even when they do not want to let him back into their country.

My Estonia. Passport Forgery, Meat Jelly Eaters, And Other Stories Details

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Fubai says

I really enjoyed this book. As Estonian it was interesting to read how one foreigner guy sees us and tries to blend in. It was really funny and we still use some quotes from it in our everyday life. Even my husband who never reads a book read it and was laughing pretty hard. This book is definitely one of my favorites from My series. And I've read most of them. If they still plan to have a presentation in autumn and I'm still in Estonia I won't miss it for the world.

I also have to say that this series have made me to write down my own experiences of working in Ireland :) Thanks!

Susan says

On page 219 he questions Epp's desire to read a book on how to write and says, "Why would you read a book on how to write? Didn't you just open your desk drawer, pull out a bottle of whiskey, or open up a bottle of wine?"

I'm going to guess that that is exactly what Justin did. This book is horribly written, has no real substance, no theme, nothing.

I guess if Justin had ever looked into how to write a memoir, he might have written something slightly better, but I imagine it still wouldn't be anything I would fall in love with.

And I guess if my husband owned a publishing company it would be easy for me to get my book published too.

Beyond the poor writing, this memoir falls short on everything I hoped it could be. As someone who lived abroad in Russia for 9 years, and visited Estonia numerous times for varied lengths of time (and studied the language for 3 years), I am horribly disappointed with this book. It reads more like a teenager's therapy journal than a memoir about a young man's (or adult's) experience abroad. Justin is a whiny, disaffected, childish boy with what appears to be zero interest in experiencing life rather than just letting it happen to him. His piss-poor attitude about everything that happens to him makes it impossible to empathize, identify or remain interested.

I sincerely hope the other books in the My... publishing series are profoundly better than this.

Wendy says

Poorly written, novice author. I picked this up as I am interested in the Baltics. Hopefully young Mr. Petrone will find his voice as he ages. This is an important part of the world to be thinking about.

Ileana Cocos says

I read it right before visiting my friends in Estonia, it really helped me a lot to understand the culture and different Things that are very specific to the Estonian population, but the most useful and cool thing is how much I impressed my fellow Estonians with my knowledge about Eesti people :) recommend it if you planning on visiting Estonia, or if you are just curious what an Estonian life looks like.

Elevate Difference says

Long Island native Justin Petrone, like many young people, wanted to shake up his life after graduating from college. He wasn't sure how, but he managed to do it in a big way. *My Estonia* tells his true story of a life-altering year of love and timeliness.

"Finland really was my last hope. It was calling me in my sleep from Helsinki: an open-air mental institution on the other side of the world." Little did he know joining a foreign correspondence program wouldn't just change his direction for a few shorts weeks. Ultimately, his compass would be facing north for a time longer than he ever imagined.

On his first day in Finland, he met the captivating Estonian named Epp. She wasn't so much concerned with direction as long as she was moving. Justin quickly fell in love with her as she took him on a winding road to Estonia through England, France, Italy, and Ireland. Once it was decided they would marry, they settled for a while in Estonia so Epp could finish school.

As his time in Estonia progressed, Justin discovered the good, the bad, and the beautiful of this little country that many Americans are unable to locate on a world map. The small size of Estonia allowed him to explore the medieval old town of Tallinn, the hip university area of Tartu, and the bogs of the south.

He moved to Estonia in January, a time of year when the country is covered with ice and snow, and was hit by bitter cold days and a darkness that falls by mid-afternoon. Although he handled the weather well, other things didn't come as easily: "When most people think about adjusting to life in a northern country during the winter, they think about being depressed by the dark and the cold and turning to alcohol for relief. But wasn't the weather that starved me of joy in Estonia; it was the awful food."

Through humor and humility I was able to connect with his experience. It also helps that I've been to Estonia and related to many of his observations. The one aspect of Estonia that I do disagree with, though, is his initial interpretation of the people. He never displays contempt or even very much irritation, but does paint them as not being personable. I'd agree their culture isn't as open armed as, say, Brazilians or Italians are, but I was met with a lot of kindness and felt very welcome during my stay.

From his description of Tallinn's Old Town to the college town of Tartu, anyone will become intrigued by this unique nation. This could be seen as a travel novel for people who have an interest in Estonia, but underneath is a much deeper story. Anyone who has moved somewhere unfamiliar, or unexpectedly fallen in love, can relate to this book. Even if you've only imagined finding love in an exotic place, this would be an interesting read for you.

Review by Andrea Hance

Leeanne Haworth says

The story of an American college grad with a lack of ambition and direction ends up falling in love with an Estonian girl and moves to Estonia. The author's reflections are somewhat whiney, self-righteous, and immature at times. However, that could be a reflection of his youth and general lack of life experience. The book is not especially well written. It is one man's story of expat life in Estonia. His Estonia does not track well with "my Estonia."

Maris says

It was passively interesting to read as an Estonian trying to understand the mindset of foreigners, but does not deserve a place on my bookshelf.

Kristiina Lind says

Very nice to read as an Estonian. Õany things to recognise and also to see from another perspective. Also brutally honest, I would say, but this definitely adds rather than decreases the value.

Daniela Medina says

Estonia is a country in the Baltic Region, located 'somewhere' in Eastern Europe. It's a democratic Parliamentary Republic divided into fifteen counties, its capital (and largest city) being Tallinn. Its population of 1.3 million makes it one of the least-populous member states of the European Union (which they joined in 2004) and its territory covers 45, 227 km² , fact that makes it a VERY tiny country, at least according to South American standards =).

So, basically, that's what Wikipedia told me the first time I googled Estonia, several months ago. But after having read this book, I can proudly say that my knowledge of this country is quite deeper than it used to be. I'm not yet an expert, but I've got something to begin with...

Having the chance to learn more about Estonia and Estonians was essentially what I liked the most about the book. Justin's reactions to Estonia's way of life were amusing. They made me imagine myself in the same place, being new in a country that is completely different from my own, and meeting new kind of people, trying new food and learning a language that seems to be more difficult to learn than Klingon.... Considering that Klingon doesn't even exist hahaha.

But I can't write this review without mentioning something that I consider to be essential: I didn't like Justin's reactions. I didn't like his constant whining. I didn't like his negative - and sometimes childish - attitude towards everything, at times even towards Epp. I didn't like his lack of enthusiasm, his lack of ability to be amazed at his brand new life in this brand new place. I didn't like Justin's difficulties to adapt to the new environment. I didn't like Justin's personality. Well, to sum up my main feelings about him, I should say that

I simply didn't like Justin. I don't mean to be offensive, just honest. I disliked the author and that made me want to finish the book as soon as possible. Especially in some parts that I found particularly annoying.

MINOR SPOILERS FROM HERE

When he whines about the weather.

When he whines about the area in Tallinn where their flat is located.

When he whines about his past, his parents, his loneliness.

When he whines about every single aspect of his past life.

When he whines about every single aspect of his current life.

When he asks Epp to marry him, but 'not now, just when we feel like doing it' (?)

When he says the food is disgusting and overreacts about everything.

When he acts childish and tells Epp that he doesn't want to marry her. (It sounded way too harsh and hurtful to my ears... I don't understand how she forgives him so easily).

When he says he feels lonely DURING HIS FIRST DAY in Estonia.

When he says he's been living there for three months and he's sad because he doesn't have any true friends (Come one, finding true friends is not something that happens in three months. Sometimes not even during a lifetime!)

I know that moving to another country - in this case from the United States to Estonia - is not an easy decision. I know that it's difficult putting your past, your family, friends, neighborhood, homeland, etc. behind your back and start a new life across the ocean. I know it takes huge amounts of courage and hard work to do so. I know. But Justin's attitude was one of permanent complain, whining about everything and from day zero. At first it wasn't seriously bothering me, but when that attitude started to be repetitive and recurrent, I got annoyed. Estonian winter is hard and he knew that before traveling there in that time of the year. But he decided to do it anyway. No one forced him to make that decision, it was his call. He was a grown-up man starting a new life far away from his comfort zone. What was he thinking? That everything was going to be easy, as in a contemporary fairytale? You can't be so naïve when you're making such an important change in your life. And it's not fair to Epp either. She knows and appreciates what he's doing for her, but she's sacrificing things too, and betting on their relationship just like him. She tries to do her best to make him feel good; she is caring and understanding - a bit crazy sometimes - but sweet and supportive. And he acts as a child. I got the sensation that he is permanently overreacting and exaggerating the facts. But of course, this is just my personal, subjective appreciation. I don't own the truth and I know that universal truth is not something to be owned. I don't even believe in it!

So, I didn't like the personality of the main character, who happens to be also the author of the book. The plot is not that interesting, doesn't happen much but it's not 'boring' either. When you don't empathize with an important character of a story - not to mention the main one - enjoying the lecture in a relaxed way becomes a very difficult task. You're permanently thinking: 'why?!!' 'Why does he do this?' and adopting a critical attitude towards everything he says or does. That's what happened to me. I didn't like Justin and that was impossible to ignore. I'm sorry, Justin. I hope you understand me and don't feel offended (if you ever read this review).

But I liked to learn more about Estonia, I've had good laughs and, since I've started reading this book, there's nothing in the world I would like to eat more than a full plate of pelmeenid with sour cream...

Miroslav Nem?ok says

The book is full of laughs, surprises, familiar surroundings (if you reside in Tallinn) and uncertainty while remaining incredibly smooth to read. I would recommend it to all expats incoming to Estonia for whom things may be confusing once in a while. Yet, this book proves that it's everyone's case.
