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Sonderlust: The World Through The Eyes Of A Ukrainian Taxi Driver



Synopsis

I never thought anybody would ever ask my story. I never imagined some part of me would be saved for history. These are Dmitrii's parting words. A charming middle-aged man, Dmitrii has an ineffably dangerous way about him. We picked him at random from the thousands of taxi drivers in Odessa - the city known as the "Jewel of the Black Sea". Two days earlier we spoke to Leonid, a generation older. He told us a story bookended by the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the war in Eastern Ukraine a century later. A life which was - still is - profoundly affected by both. But how many stories will never be told? The billions of faces that comprise the vast mosaic of our world, with all its teeming humanity: behind each is a limitless depth of experience all its own. There's a word for this revelation. Sonder: The realization that each passerby represents an entire lifetime lived, unlike any other - each as vibrant and intricate and bursting with emotion as your own. Awareness of this vastness of cumulative experience is as exhilarating as it is baffling. It is a notion which is at once daunting and delicious. It is impossible to grok. But it inspires in us an insatiable lust to try. To travel the world to find answers to a deceptively simple question: "What is it like to be human?" The premise for this book, the first in a series in Sonderlust, is a simple one. We - Marshall (who was in Ukraine at the time), and Keyur (who was not) - would pick two taxi drivers in Odessa, at random, and ask them to tell us the stories of their lives. They - not we - would be in charge of the direction of conversation. We had nothing to preempt the narrative other than a few general questions; no angle, and no preconceptions about what we might hear. This book would tell their stories, whatever shape these stories took. Our intuition was that whatever we heard would be worth preserving, worth retelling. We were not disappointed. Sonderlust animates in us a desire to learn ever more: to seek out the thoughts and perspectives of people who lead lives far different from our own. We want to know their stories - not in the context we imagine we should find them, but in context that they set for themselves. How do they see their own lives? How do they see ours? Not only so that they can speak, but so that we can hear what they have to say. What can we learn about human nature from the taxi driver in Ukraine? What can the sex worker in Thailand tell us about love, kindness, and gratitude? What does she want most of all for her children - and what's her favorite kind of fruit? What might the Sherpa in Nepal's Himalayan highlands have to teach us about how to live a good life, if only we thought to ask? Join us. To experience human life in all of its endless forms is a Sisyphean challenge, but one we eagerly accept. We have to start somewhere: why not here? Jump down the rabbit hole, and see just how far Sonderlust takes you.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Sonderlust is a story about people. While the people in this case happen to be two randomly-chosen taxi drivers in Odessa, Ukraine, the narrative isn't about Crimea or Putin or any other contemporary lens you might expect. Political and economic issues loom in the background, to be sure, but only to the extent that they relate to the human experiences being described. With this objective and non-judgmental approach, the authors hold true to a supreme notion: that the story of someone's life is worth being told for the sake of itself. When you remove ulterior motives from an interview and change the subject's role from supporting evidence for a broader narrative to the narrative itself, the stage is set for beautiful and personal revelations. Through the words of two taxi drivers, I witnessed decades of volatility, desperation, and perseverance experienced by an entire region. I glimpsed the frustration of what it's like to struggle not because of a lack of ambition or cleverness, but because of corruption and war and other circumstances entirely out of your control. And I felt empathy for the men and their universally human desire to tell their story. I highly recommend this book to anyone with an insatiable curiosity for people, and I'm excited for future additions to the series.

This is a well written book which cleverly tells the personal struggles and triumphs of two distinctly different Ukrainian men who live in a world that most Americans do not even know exists. The book intertwines the interviews with the two men, the author's personal observations of his travels in Ukraine, and historical facts to create a true story that leaves the reader wanting to learn more. It inspires the reader to step outside of our fears and talk with the people around us and perhaps even travel abroad to discover a world outside of our own. Furthermore, the book brings home to us just how interconnected our world is. People struggle with the same issues in wealth and poverty, war and peace, democracy and communism. We are truly one world.

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