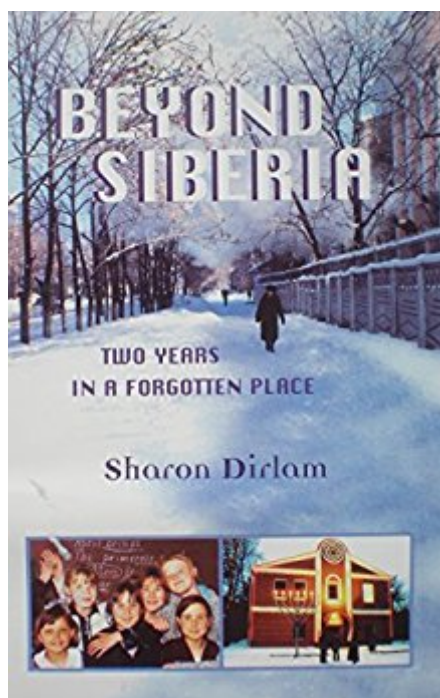


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Beyond Siberia: Two Years In A Forgotten Place



Synopsis

As Peace Corps volunteers, the author and her husband spent two years in the Jewish Autonomous Region of Russia. In this isolated place, people were experiencing new freedoms and old beliefs, dysfunctional bureaucracies and strong friendships, always with a love of the dramatic and a determination to endure. Their passions and intrigues are the heart of this memoir.

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Customer Reviews

The author has such an astute power of observing small details, how people walk, dress, the many foods she and her husband are offered, that I felt I took the journey with her. And it was not like a travel article, in which writers try to describe places in such a way to inspire the reader to visit the described locale. Here was an absence of the beauty of nature that causes wonderment, rather the entire overview of a forgotten small town in Siberia near the border to China. And its climate over the span of two years. Cold, and hot. Windows that do not open, no screens to keep out the summer's mosquitoes, I was content reading it in comfort and admiring this couple and how they endured the two years, which some Peace Corps members much younger than Dirlam gave up on

after one year. There were many get-togethers with the neighbors, the teachers, and vodka flowed. The food was rather monotonous, and deserts often chocolate bars and sliced apples, healthy food and then vodka again. Mainly consumed by the Russians, not by the author. She and her husband endured the full two years they had signed on for in a place far from the comforts of home without complaints and adjusted to the pace in this "lost" place in the world. One thing Sharon found and treasured in their two years in outer Siberia, was the friendship and helpfulness of the Russians among whom they lived, their honesty and often sweetness of character. One did indeed experience the humaneness of Russians and Americans when living together in a village situation, and that there were no borders to comradeship and that deep friendships could form quickly in a land without borders.

My name is mentioned, so it's gotta be good! Really, Sharon, thank you for writing this memoir. It is too easy to forget the way things were, and it is good to be reminded: to realize how much things have changed and how far Russia has come from those early days of transition - But also how much some things (like relationships and values) remain the same. Your descriptions are so insightful and vivid, the entire book was a pleasure to read. Naturally, I am proud to have been one of the first Peace Corps Volunteers to serve in the RFE - "Beyond Siberia" - and happy to be the sole Un-Returned PCV in Vladivostok. Wishing you all the best. Thank you again for getting this published. Denis P Boyle

As I read these other reviews I'm curious if they were reading the same book that I read. I gave it 2 stars only because I have read worse books. That is not to say that the information in the book is not interesting, or heartfelt, but I just feel poorly written. Dirlam repeats herself in many useless issues, such as the numerous times that she mentions the revealing dress of the Russian girls. The book is also a bit scattered, it did not flow well. I would recommend against purchasing this book, rather for an excellent book on Siberia read Colin Thurbron's "In Siberia" it will delight and amaze you.

BEYOND SIBERIA is a very readable book about life in one of the least well known parts of Russia--Birobidzhan, the capital of the Jewish Autonomous Region in Russia's Far East. Dirlam and her husband worked for two years as Peace Corps volunteers in that remote region, from 1996 to 1998. Written from the notes that the author kept in her journal during that time, this book chronicles her life, work, and travels in an area of Russia seldom visited by people from the West. Many of the

stories focus on her experiences as a teacher at the Birobidzhan Pedagogical Institute--including classroom conditions, friendships (and conflicts) with her Russian students and Russian colleagues, and interactions with other Peace Corps volunteers. Dirlam provides numerous insightful observations about human relationships in the workplace, as well as among her own personal friends and acquaintances in the Russian Far East. I especially appreciated her honesty in describing both the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures, of working under often difficult conditions in a part of the world that she calls "a forgotten place." A professional writer before going to Russia, Dirlam does a good job of describing the difficulties of daily life in eastern Russia. I liked her no-nonsense approach to the challenges that she and her husband encountered every day--from shopping and cooking to doing the laundry and buying a train ticket. And I'm sure that readers will enjoy her stories about the Russians whom she befriended during her two years in Birobidzhan. Having lived in the Russian Far East myself, I can attest to the authenticity of her observations and the accuracy of the many situations that she writes about. BEYOND SIBERIA is a book that will be of particular interest to the hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers who have served in Russia themselves. I also recommend it to anyone with an interest in Russia--and to armchair travellers who would like to learn more about life in this remote "forgotten place." A very good read!

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