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American Book Author Sends Cautionary Message from Barnaul

By Lena Smirnova

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Sandy Krolick opted for a down-to-earth lifestyle in Barnaul after spending 18 years jetting around America.

He has clambered to the top of the American business world, snatched up executive positions at large international firms, including Ernst & Young and General Electric, and collected over 2 million air miles.

But now, Sandy Krolick lives in the Siberian city of Barnaul, goes to banyas, grows vegetables on his garden plot and writes books.

And he prefers it that way. Krolick's books openly criticize the rapid American consumerism and economic expansion that he was born into.

"I am fully Americanized. I was at the top of American business, and I am more a product of the Western curriculum than anybody else I know, yet I have taken a big step back

and criticized it systematically," Krolick said of his books and current lifestyle.

His most recent book, "Veronika: The Siberian's Tale," was released in Moscow at the end of this month and is available in English and Russian. It is a story about a young man from Altai Krai who is in love and graduating college. As he hungrily rushes to the heights of Russian capitalism and becomes a globe-trotting businessman, the young man ends up betraying his family and his land.

The main character's story is meant to reflect Russia's broader march to modernization and the dangers associated with it.

A successful businessman, Krolick sold everything he had and moved to Barnaul eight years ago after marrying a Russian woman from the area. He now writes books and a regular online blog on geopolitical issues and occasionally teaches in local language schools.

Krolick is also a staunch supporter of the more traditional lifestyle: gardening, fishing and hunting. It is these traditions that are in danger from the rapid modernization taking place in the country, the author believes.

Krolick said that similar to residents of Moscow, people in Barnaul go into debt to buy opulent things such as luxury cars and jewelry, simply because they crave the image. And though Krolick's books are critical of Western society, he said his acquaintances in the U.S. actually are more receptive to his message than the Siberian locals.

"They've seen the beast, and they understand that there are problems. The Russians, particularly the Siberians, don't want to see it," Krolick said. "During the Soviet period, basically a century, they could not participate in this wild economic expansion, this party. What they said is, 'We don't want to hear about anything. We finally got the goodies, and we're going to have a good time.'"

This is one of the ideas Krolick tries to convey in "Veronika," and it is a development of the ideas featured in the author's previous works.

In the first book he wrote in Russia, "The Recovery of Ecstasy," Krolick talks of his first impressions of Siberia and reflects on his college upbringing, culminating in a critique of Western culture as compared with the more traditional Russian way of life.

His second work, "Apocalypse of the Barbarians," which was also released in Russian, is a series of essays on geopolitical issues. Here Krolick argues that people from the West are starting to realize that their current system of consumerism and economic expansion is not sustainable, and they would welcome its collapse. But he warns that the developing nations — most notably India, China and Russia — will ardently resist such a collapse.

"They have been starved for what you folks have been playing with for a century, and they want it all and they want it now," Krolick said. "And you're going to have to rip it from their dying hands to close this thing down."

"Veronika: The Siberian's Tale" is available in English and Russian at three bookstores in Moscow: Moskva (8 Tverskaya Ulitsa), Biblio Globus (6/3 Myasnitskaya Ulitsa) and Dom

Knigi (8 Ulitsa Novy Arbat).

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