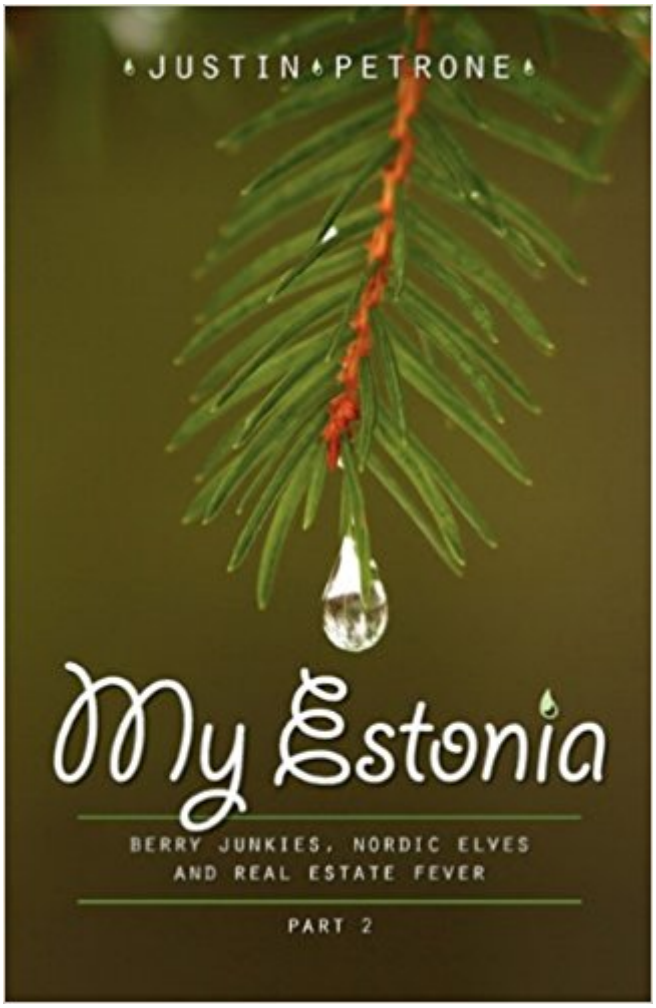
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My Estonia 2: Berry Junkies, Nordic Elves, And Real Estate Fever



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Synopsis

The year was 2003, the country Estonia. Great changes were blowing across this small land perched in the fringes of the north - a vote to join a union of European nations, a blizzard of Western consumerism, a feverish demand for real estate. Bankrolled by Scandinavian moneymen, it promised to draw a sheet over the corpse of the socialist economy and make everything shiny and new. While Estonia pondered its fate as a new member of the glittering West, I wrestled with my own fate as a husband and father to be, at the age of 23. I had been drawn to northern Europe by its gem-like allure but now had to deal with the permanence of my decisions. I was being pulled apart, tugged back and forth between this land of forest people who were hard to befriend and the needs of my own big Italian-American family. As the days grew crushingly short and the polar night set in, a tense debate between destiny and free will stormed within me. Was this what I had wanted?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As another American who adores Estonia and has spent quite a bit of time over the years there... I just adore these stories and perspectives!....there are so many layers beneath the usual sights....from the sights to the soul...Rebecca

Probably in an attempt to say, "Understand me!" my Estonian colleague gifted me with the second volume of US American Justin Petrone’s expatriation experiences in the dark winters of Tallinn. Petrone writes about his Estonian life with the turns of phrase of an expert and experienced novelist

with street smarts. This makes My Estonia 2 a pleasurable read whether intercultural affairs are of interest to the reader or not. The level of description gives the feel of really being at the author's side as he reflects on everything from winter weather workplace politics to shopping for real estate.I am reviewing this book, however, not on these considerable merits, but from the perspective of how the book might be of interest to my fellow interculturalists. What it is in fact is a first hand account of how a stranger looks to sort out his life in a different country, to manage a cross-cultural relationship, juggle a financially precarious work life, and become the father of a spanking new baby girl. It is about the vicissitudes of identity in a strange land. It is about life stages and their challenges as much as about residing abroad. More introspective than the first volume of the same name (see my review), it nonetheless gives enticing descriptions of both the culture and diversity of the Estonian people and the landscapes of the country, to say nothing of the experience of winter in those climes.The events recounted in the book reflect the year 2003. Much of the book concerns Justin and Epp's search for a place to live in the city of Tallinn. The search for real estate reveals the class and economic structure of Estonian sociaty and gives a first hand account of various living conditions and growing class distinctions in a society aping the West after its release from the Soviet sphere and pending its entry into the European Union.One of the most telling events in the narrative is the visit of Petrone's parents from New York to Estonia. This provides him with the dilemma of how to reflect on, explain and perhaps defend his choice of this remote country to his family. It also forces him to observe in his parents the US American habits from which he came, but now feels alienated from, given acculturation to his new Estonian home. His parents' presence and behaviors as well as their ongoing expectations of him are a jolt of awareness of how much he has changed under the influence of his chosen expatriation. His reaction is a mixture of familiarity and embarrassment, causing him to reflect and remark, "I had become the ugliest of Americans, the one who left America and didn't feel particularly bad about it... I had betrayed my nation's sense of universal superiority." It raises the question of what we discover about ourselves and our origins when we live abroad for any length of time.There is a lot of talk currently about the new generation's relationship to mobility and difference as radically different form what we have become accustomed to in living and working abroad. Petrone, at least mentally, belongs to the "global nomad" tribe. At the end of some 350 pages, the reader is as uncertain as Petrone himself about where his future will be lived out, Estonia, Chile, India, Australia, or the Big Apple. His wife Epp is equally mobile in spirit. There is lots of rumination about what cultural context will mean to their lives, in terms of practicalities, but also in terms of what it is to adapt to and succeed in whatever the next chosen environment may bring.Petrone is kind enough to include upfront a map of where Estonia lies on the

Baltic Sea, not a bad start, when we have all too many people on either side of the Atlantic who guess that Tallinn is in Italy, somewhere close to Milano.This is a deliberately short review, hopefully just enough to encourage you to have a look, hopefully enjoy and allow the author’s reflections to stir your awareness of your own experiences with diversity and to appreciate the strangers in our midst.

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