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With Light Steam: A Personal Journey through the Russian Baths

Bryon MacWilliams

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Bryon MacWilliams : With Light Steam: A Personal Journey through the Russian Baths before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised With Light Steam: A Personal Journey through the Russian Baths:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Lovely Prose, Very Readable!By CustomerI was delighted to learn about the banya! Talk of steaming in Russia didn't sound up my interest alley, however, I found reading the book an adventure not only in steaming, but in the history of a country that seems so distant and unreachable. A memoir of a decade in post-wall Russia as an American journalist finding his way through the banya, is written in prose that rings

true with the love he found in his banya and the Russian friends he found while steaming. The changes to Russia and how it affected the banya, as well as the people, are as fascinating as the vivid descriptions of the many ways of steaming. The sensitivity shown in the author's lovely style of writing tells as much about the man as it does his subject. Best of all the steaming was described in such detail as reached my senses, that I have come away believing that the banya is much like a poem.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. A moving and beautifully written account
By CustomerOnce in awhile I come across a book that I'm thrilled to return to, evening after pleasurable evening. This is one of these rare ones. The author shares his personal search with elegance and honesty, in the startling context of the post-Soviet Russian experience. It is a generous story. I hope it gets the recognition it deserves.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. A great read... You'll enjoy and you'll learn something about places that most people don't know
By Marguerit E. FerraEven if you had NO interest in steaming, you will love this book. I enjoyed every page and learned a lot about modern Russia. I also enjoyed Bryon MacWilliams' personal adventures there as an American. I heartily recommend this book and I hope that you order it and read it. A great read.

In 1996 Bryon MacWilliams left the relative stability of the United States for the chaos of post-Soviet Russia, and stayed. Over the course of nearly twelve years he reported on academe and the sciences for the world's leading publications, and sought out the best bathsheds;or banyasheds;everywhere he went. His story of Russia through its cult of steam begins on a frosty Sunday morning in a gypsy cab traveling to a bathhouse in Moscow, where the steam is conjured by an out-of-work carpenter named Grisha, who takes on MacWilliams as a kind of apprentice, allowing him into an otherwise closed world through which MacWilliams could see himself, and Russia, with different eyes. The Russian bathers insist, only half-jokingly, that the American is a spy. Writing in a highly engaging style, MacWilliams travels the country to convey the breadth of banya culture and what it means to steam, a process that is at once a simple cleansing and a deep purification. It awakens the body and quiets the mind, generating waves of good feeling akin to an endorphin high. Each chapter of this splendid book is an episodesheds;spanning from several hours to several dayssheds;from the Far North, Moscow, the Ural Mountains, the Solovetsky Islands, and a southern stretch of the Volga River. With *Light Steam*, the title is derived from the phrase used in banyas in lieu of goodbye, is the only book in English devoted to the banya and the only volume in any language to present Russia through the lens of its bath culture, the most Russian thing there is. General readers and scholars alike will be enchanted with this unforgettable portrait of a people and a millennia-spanning tradition.

"With *Light Steam* is travel writing at its most insightful and most intimate. Wrapped in a towel or not, sweating profusely and beaten lightly by sticks, Bryon MacWilliams goes deep into the viscera of ordinary Russian life and finds there something true about his own troubled, steadily racing heart." - Ken Kalfus, author of *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*"I love this book! Even if you have never taken a banya, nor been to Russia, this book will convince you the banya could very well be Russia's greatest export." - Mikkel Aaland, author of *Sweat*"Often very frank (this is a PG-13 read at least) and open, 'With *Light Steam*' is a personal and engaging look at a side of Russian life that few westerners can claim entry to or experience in... MacWilliams travels the breadth and depth of Russia following his passion for the banya,...and traveling with him is a joy. He is a refreshingly self-deprecating, easy-going traveler and a superb storyteller. This is a book not to be missed." -- Paul E. Richardson, "Russian Life"
"With *Light Steam* skillfully blends Russian culture, ethnography, and history with personal reminiscences and experiences to produce a thoroughly engaging book that illuminates the Russian soul." ndash;ndash;Christine D. Worobec, author of *Possessed* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2001)"A genre-defying mosaic of memoir, historical research and a reflection on time and place, 'With *Light Steam*' is easily in a league with 'Travels in Siberia,' by Ian Frazier, for spectacular American travel writing on Russia." --Paul Connell, *Newcity Lit*"For many in the West, Russia and its people still remain a mystery, but this memoir by MacWilliams provides an illuminating take on the Russian psyche and the nation's culture... Here, amid the rising steam, people take their clothes off and let their hair down before strangers, bidding their farewells 'with light steam.'" - Rutgers Magazine (Winter 2015)