

An Opposite Effect

By Seraphina Michelina Aurelia Bogomolova-Huotelin

Due to my early childhood circumstances stemming out of the Cold War clandestine romance of my parents, I was completely unaware of the fact that I had a biological twin. I grew up in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg) alongside a boy who was told to be my brother yet I never felt that way about him myself. This puzzled me greatly and, some decades later, I was prompted to start an investigative journey that would lead to a profound realisation.

Using research, facts, DNA tests, intuition, memories, and my subconscious, I was able to reconstruct the picture of what had happened and why I always felt a certain void that needed to be filled.

The result of my investigation indicates that I, like my biological twin brother, was born in France, and not in Leningrad, USSR, as I always believed.

My biological parents met each other in Paris. He was a Soviet operative undercover in diplomatic services in Paris, called Mikhail, and she — a 19 y.o. girl of the Russian aristocratic émigré circles, called Sophie de Prittwitz (married name Druon). An unlikely, yet striking pair. At the moment of their encounter, none of them could have even envisaged the implications of their romantic affair.

And the implications were severe, — according to the protocol of the Soviet intelligence services the couple had to give up their children after their birth. However, in those times, prior to the childbirth, the number of children to be given birth to was unknown. Having found out that she gave birth to twins, Sophie de Prittwitz faced an unwinnable situation in which she took a bold yet cruel and calculated decision: to give up just one child. The choice of being ‘sacrificed’ to the Soviet system fell on me. As a result, I was taken to Leningrad, USSR, and my twin brother, later adopted by Sophie’s husband, Georges Richard Druon, stayed with Sophie in Paris, France. The decision separated the twins, creating cultural, political, territorial, and emotional distance between us.

On the arrival to Leningrad, I was brought to the Institute Ott — a research medical institution located in the centre of the city. The Institute Ott was responsible for providing medical care

for me and for creating “official” documentation for my subsequent registration in the Soviet Union.

As soon as the needed “official” documents were arranged, I was placed into a foster family of Russian-Ukrainian descent. My parents were to be Nikolai Nikolaevich Bogomolov (1941–2011) and Tatyana Petrovna Zhurilo (1948–). The family resided in Leningrad, and, by the time I was given to them, already had a new born, a boy of the same age as myself. The boy, Petr Nikolaevich Bogomolov, automatically became a substitute for my biological twin brother. Neither I, nor the substitute, nor my biological twin knew of this elaborate arrangement of the Soviet secret services.

At the same time, my biological twin started his life journey in Paris with our mother and her relatives, not knowing anything about his twin sister. He was growing in the Russian aristocratic émigré circles of Paris, as my and his family on our mother’s side comes from a mix of such aristocratic lineages as the Bobrynsky, Trubetskoy, Shuvalov, Dolgorukov, Potocki, Karnovich, von Prittwitz, with their roots going as deep in time as Rurik and Yaroslav Court and Grand Princes of Kiev period.

As I was being ‘cared for’ by the Soviet state system, my twin brother was surrounded by Sophie’s care and the environment of the Russian aristocratic émigré circles, facing a very different reality from mine. The reality that shaped him and his outlook on life. Similarly, I was affected by the ideology and system I had been placed into, and the immediate environment I experienced as a child. The divide in our upbringing, ideals, moral standards and views was glaring. But neither of us were aware of this fact, growing up and living our separate lives.

Which one of us turned out the best? The answer lies in a perspective.

Regardless of Sophie’s calculated decision that affected my early life, I grew up into an independent, strong, and brilliant individual who is not afraid of challenges, seeing them as an opportunity for development and improvement. I have also successfully incorporated both worlds of my biological parents — Russia, the country where I grew up and spent the first 23 years of my life, and the Western world where I have spent several decades travelling, living and working in London, New York, Dubai, Geneva, Berlin.

And, what about my twin? Ironically, the calculated decision produced the opposite effect.

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