



Memoirs Of A Cold War Son (Singular Lives)

Post, Jr. Gaines

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In 1951 Gaines Post was a gangly, bespectacled, introspective teenager preparing to spend a year in Paris with his professorial father and older brother; his mother, who suffered from extreme depression, had been absent from the family for some time. Ten years later, now less gangly but no less introspective, he was finishing a two-year stint in the army in West Germany and heading toward Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship, having narrowly escaped combat in the Berlin crisis of 1961. His quietly intense coming-of-age story is both self-revealing and reflective of an entire generation of young men who came to adulthood before the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War.

Post's experiences in high school in Madison, Wisconsin, and Paris, his Camus-influenced undergraduate years at Cornell University, and his army service in Germany are set very effectively against the events of the Cold War. McCarthyism and American crackdowns on dissidents, American foreign and military policy in Western Europe in the nuclear age, French and German life and culture, crises in Paris and Berlin that nearly bring the West to war and the Post family to dissolution—these are the larger scenes and subjects of his self-disclosure as a contemplative, conflicted "Cold War agnostic."

His intelligent, talented mother and her fragile health hover over Post's narrative, informing his hesitant relationships with women and his acutely questioning sense of self-worth. His story is strongly academic and historical as well as political and military; his perceptions and judgments lean toward no ideological extreme but remain true to the heroic ideals of his boyhood during the Second World War.

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