

A New American

Ex-Soviet dictator's son passes U.S. citizenship test

by Terrence Petty

PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Sergei Krushchev breezed through the U.S. citizenship test and next month will swear loyalty to a country and way of life that Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev — his father — had promised to bury.

"We both passed," Krushchev said with a smile as he and his wife left the Providence office of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service on Wednesday.

"Our heart is here. We will be good citizens," said the 63-year-old Krushchev, an engineer who once designed rockets that were aimed at the West.

Krushchev missed one out of twenty questions on the citizenship test. His wife, Valentina Golenko, got all of them right. They'll take their loyalty oath on July 12, the final step for citizenship.

Back during the Cold War, when Nikita Krushchev was in power, his son's decision to become an American would probably have been seen as an act of treason. So is Nikita Krushchev spinning in his grave?

Sergei Krushchev doesn't think so.

"The world has changed" since the times when his father was in power, he said. But then he added,

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"I hope he would approve."

Krushchev has said his father's "we will bury you" remark was misunderstood. The remark meant that capitalism would die and that the Soviet economic system would bury it.

Krushchev was besieged by reporters after taking the citizenship test. All wanted to know why he had decided to become an American citizen.

"When you are living in a country, it is natural to become a citizen," replied Krushchev, who moved to the United States in 1991 and teaches at Brown University.

Krushchev argued there was no irony in him becoming an American citizen — because his country of birth and the United States are no longer enemies.

"There's no Cold War," he said.

Still, Krushchev conceded that there might be Stalinists back in his homeland who would view him as a traitor.

"But you find crazy people everywhere," he said.

Sergei Krushchev came to the United States as a visiting professor. He got his green card in 1993. By law, he had to wait another five years before he could apply for citizenship. His attorney, Dan Danilow, called Krushchev last year to ask if he wanted to take the citizenship test.

"I told him I needed to think about it," said Krushchev. "I needed to decide what was better,

to return to Moscow or stay here."

Krushchev and his wife decided they belong here.

They live in a suburban ranch house. He drives a Buick. They shop at the Rhode Island Mall.

He's published three books in the United States, and a fourth comes out next year.

Krushchev has something like celebrity status at Brown University, an Ivy League school. And he says he's received no job offers from Russia that could dissuade him from giving up his cozy life.

"I have the opportunity to express my views, to write my books, to lecture, to teach," he said.

All of the corruption and turmoil in his homeland do nothing to add to Russia's appeal Krushchev blames much of the trouble on Russian President Boris Yeltsin: "Russia needs new leadership."

But Krushchev isn't completely turning his back on Mother Russia.

He still has an apartment and a large country house in Russia. And he'll keep visiting his three grown-up sons.

Krushchev reads Russian newspapers every day. Russian novelists are among his favorite writers, and he listens to Russian music.

Even though this Krushchev will be an American as of July 12, he says, "Of course, I'm Russian."