

For Immediate Release

Contact: John Salak, The Salak Group

Telephone: +1 201 798 6481

Email: jsalak@thesalakgroup.com

American Author, M.G. Crisci to Receive Russian Cultural Award

WASHINGTON D.C. Manhattan business executive, turned California author, M.G. Crisci, a man with no Russian Ancestry, will be honored for Russian-American cultural contributions, along with three Russian dignitaries, at the annual Friends of Russia Board of Governors dinner on July 31 on Gibson Island.

Crisci's journey started simply enough. He met a Russian cabdriver with a PhD in computer science while on business in Miami Beach. According to Crisci, the man seemed happy despite that fact that his lack of English fluency had limited his ability to obtain a more skilled job. "For some inexplicable reason, I asked, 'what is the most surprising thing you have learned about America?' His response changed my life forever. 'Thirty million dead and nobody remembers.' As we talked, he explained how every man, woman and child in Russia defended *Rodina* (The Motherland) during World War II, yet nobody in America seemed to know or care."

"I spent some time reading and researching, when suddenly a little known exhibition arrived in San Diego, California, entitled 'World War II through Russian Eyes.' After crying for the better part of two hours, I decided to do something." That "something" became a book entitled *Call Sign, White Lily* about a beautiful young girl from Moscow, Lilia Litvyak, who loved fireflies, wildflowers, boys and planes. She was also Hitler's worst nightmare, a deadly, fierce female fighter pilot who completed 268 missions and recording 15 solo kills before her plane and remains disappeared over the Eastern Ukraine on August 11, 1943, 17 days before her 22nd birthday.

"Lilia story was intended to be a metaphor for the terrible sacrifices that so many Russians endured, and to help Americans better understand the culture of a determined and proud people." According to the author, *White Lily* took three years to complete. "The project was consciousness raising experience for me. I traveled to Russia and Ukraine, spent hours with my loving Russian collaborators, Valentina Vaschenko and Yelena Sivolap, who gave without reservation, interviewed Lilia's last remaining childhood friend, Lyudmila Agafejeva, stood in the alley on Novoslobodskaya Street where Lilia played, visited the modest museum in her name in Krasny Luch, and wept at her grave site in the tiny fodor of Marinovka.

"I also had the privilege of living in the homes of ordinary people, made friends with many who wished to help, and ate 15 different kinds of Borscht. According to Crisci, it was during these travels, he realized much of what he had been taught to believe about Russia and its citizens was steeped in political rhetoric and media stereotypes. He also discovered had Russian their own imaginative stereotypes of the average American.

"As soon as we read the book, we realized Lilia's inspirational story had the potential to be a symbol of the human decency embedded within the Russian culture," said Cultural Centre Director, Dr. Yuriy Zaytsev. "If people around the globe were to learn about our fallen hero as a human being and a patriot, she might serve as a catalyst for increased friendship, cooperation, and mutual understanding between nations, not unlike our accomplishments in art, music and technology. Mr. Crisci, Valentina and Yelena personify the values we wish the world to know."



The Russian Cultural Centre and Friends of the Russian Cultural Centre were created pursuant to a Bilateral Agreement signed in 1990 at the end of the Cold War by the Governments of the Federation of Russia and the United States of America, with the goal that That Our Two Nations Never Again Polarize. The mission of the institution is to provide a Harbour and Forum, outside of politics, where the Russian and American people can learn about, and enjoy, the culture of the other in the areas of Education, The Arts, Commerce, Athletics and Science.