



Paullina Simons has been forced to abandon thoughts of her Russian homeland by the deaths of her parents and grandparents.  
By FRAN METCALF

# RUSSIAN EVOLUTION

IT'S been a sad three years for Paullina Simons since the international bestselling author last came to our shores. Not only has she lost both grandparents but the Russian-born writer has also mourned the death of her parents.

Having relied heavily on her family's history, culture, birthplace and story for her 11-book writing career, their deaths have delivered a severe blow.

"I very much still feel the Russian-ness in me but in the last four years I have lost all the members of my family that brought me here," she says from her Long Island home on the US's east coast. "And so, for me, Russia has become very painful. I don't speak Russian and I don't make Russian food any more. It reminds me of my family which causes me pain. I hope it's a temporary thing."

This reluctance to dwell on thoughts of her home country might be why Simons' new novel *Children of Liberty* is set in Boston and features a Sicilian femme fatale.

But fans of Simons' *The Bronze Horseman* trilogy will not be disappointed by her new fictional offering – *Children of Liberty* is a prequel.

While *The Bronze Horseman*,

*Tatiana and Alexander* and *The Summer Garden* chronicle the lives of fair-skinned Tatiana and her lover Alexander over several decades and two continents, *Children of Liberty* tells the story of Alexander's parents, Gina (or Jane as she becomes) and Harold Barrington.

"I thought the story would be simpler than it turned out to be," Simons says in her Long Island drawl. "But the more I delved into it, the more I saw the richness of that world."

"There's something about Boston that inspires my imagination. There's so much history there. It's one of America's oldest cities and the revolution started there and the Constitution was drafted there and all the immigrants came there like they did to New York. That whole clash of the cultures is very interesting to me."

Set at the end of the 19th century, *Children of Liberty* begins with the arrival of Gina, her brother Salvo and their mother Mimoo on a ship into the port of Boston from Naples.

Determined to start a better life in a new country, 14-year-old Gina discovers a world where she can throw off the shackles of Italian tradition and chart her own course. Her path crosses with eighth-generation Bostonian Harold

Barrington, who is wealthy as well as betrothed.

And so the scene is set for a trademark Simons love story, complete with betrayal, sexual desire and conflict, against a tumultuous political backdrop with the rise of American socialism.

While Harry has a predestined future, Jane's is unwritten and the intrusion of politics in their everyday lives influences their choices and direction.

"I like these themes because they're very much like myself," Simons says.

"My father wanted us to move to America because he thought anything could happen here whereas in the Soviet Union nothing could happen – or the same things would keep happening."

Born in Leningrad in 1963, Simons moved with her family to the US at age 10. She grew up with her grandfather's stories of surviving the first terrible winter after the Battle for Leningrad began and her family lived an impoverished life until they moved to the US.

Since then, she has lived in Kansas, New York, Texas and elsewhere but now lives in Long Island with her husband and four children.

For Simons, politics and history





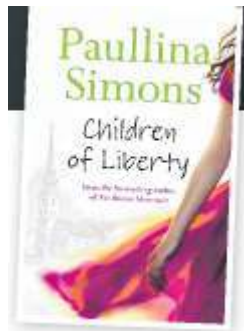
determine much about a society and *Children of Liberty* features some of the iconic personalities of the day, including Socialist Party of America presidential candidate Eugene Debs and activist Emma Goldman.

One of the book's main characters, Ben, is also involved in the construction of the Panama Canal under John Frank

Stevens, who was chief engineer of the 82km waterway from 1905 to 1907.

"I love how the personal stories all interweave with these things," Simons says. "This was a fascinating time to live. Socialism and radicalism was all part of the movement of the new working, independent-minded woman."

**Meet Paullina Simons. November 9, 6.30pm. Presbyterian Ladies College Theatre, 14 McNeil St, Peppermint Grove. Tickets \$15, include author talk, Q&A and a glass of wine. Bookings on 6460 1125 or melissa.harkins@dymocks.com.au.**



**CHILDREN OF LIBERTY**

by Paullina Simons,  
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