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Food for Thought

Cookery and writing keep Jennifer Eremeeva's fire burning

By Alastair Gill

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Jennifer Eremeeva has been inspired by Russians' reaction to the embargo on Western food imports.
PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Author and journalist Jennifer Eremeeva first came to Russia from the U.S. in 1988. Since then she has worked as a tour guide, in banking and more recently as a cookery and travel writer. She published her memoir "Lenin Lives next Door: Marriage, Martinis, and Mayhem in Moscow" in 2014 and is currently working on a historical novel.

I'm from New England, most specifically Massachusetts. I went to boarding school in Connecticut and then I went to university in New York City, so I stayed on the east coast.

I sort of fell in love with Russia when I was about 13. We didn't have a television because it broke and we asked our parents: "Are you going to fix the television?" and they said "No, we don't think we need to fix the television." So I'd go down to the school library and look

through all the books and read voraciously, and one of the books was "Nicholas and Alexandra" by Robert K. Massie. And from the moment I opened that book I was determined to go to Russia, by hook or by crook.

I met my husband at a mutual friend's birthday party in May 1991. He was in the military, he had a very important job as the commandant of the Leningradsky Railway Station, so he was a useful person to know if you were in the travel business, but it was certainly not something we should have been doing, hanging out together, not for him and not for me.

I've had my moments when I'd like to leave Russia. But now I'm so back and forth that it's almost an ideal setup for me, I'd never want to leave permanently.

It's been a very long three-year slog since the invasion of Crimea. But at the same time, I thought that the food industry would collapse, and it's just flourishing. And it's flourishing almost because of the sanctions, because you have very innovative people doing things like cheese-making, and the stuff that's going on in Danilovsky Market. And it's just been very heartening and fascinating to watch.

The foreigners who are here are really exceptional people. You have to have a lot of guts to come here, stay here, make a business, possibly make a family. A lot of people have left, and the ones who have stayed are the entrepreneurs, and they're in it for the long haul, and I admire that.

I'm working on a cookbook about Russian soup, because we should have more Russian soup. Nothing says hospitality the way a warm bowl of soup does. And I love that trend in Russian cooking now where we're taking traditional recipes but we're lightening them up and boosting the flavors and playing around with things.

Delicatessen's not exactly in my neighborhood, but it's not so far. The most innovative flavor experiments are going on there, and it's just marvelous for cocktails. It's a great place to spend the evening and get lots of little plates with friends.

I think what they're doing at Danilovsky Market is phenomenal, but I also shop at Leningradsky Market, which is on my subway line. If you're looking to save money, it's not so intense, and the prices are sometimes a third of what they can be elsewhere. Everybody's very friendly, there's a little coffee shop there, during the week there's almost no one there, they have wonderful produce and great meat, and everything's very affordable.

I love the Russian State Library, it's one of the best deals in town. For 100 rubles [$1.75] you get a library card for three years, and you can just go in. It's just the most incredible place. I don't often see that side of academic Moscow, and it's a fascinating world that hasn't really changed in the last 30 years. I try to get there as much as I can to do some work. I love sitting in the reading rooms with the backlight lamps and the wooden desks.

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