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BOOKS: ROBIN OSBORNE

Russian regime

Title: Sashenka
Author: Simon Montefiore
Publisher: Bantam
Price: $34.95

London based Simon Sebag Montefiore is the author of two excellent books about former Soviet leader, Josef Stalin – *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, and, more recently, *Young Stalin* – and is well placed to understand the dictator's excesses.

For those books, the author interviewed a range of people affected by the Stalinist purges, having first learned to speak Russian, and trawled through the maze of archives opened up in the wake of the USSR's collapse.

To highlight the injustices to a wider audience he has now penned a novel, which is not only highly readable but provides a range of insights, often deeply disturbing, into the span of 20th century Russian history.

As he explains, '*I wanted to make these strange and tragic times in Russian history interesting for readers who perhaps wouldn't read history books.*'

The story begins in St Petersburg in 1916, when the leftist Bolsheviks under Lenin were jostling for power, then moves in the second section to 1939, when the nation is preparing for WW2 but the Terror unleashed by Stalin is still a fresh memory.

It ends in 1994, when the post-Soviet openness is paving the way for the crime bosses and business oligarchs who rule today's Russia. The circle is completed.

The country's tumultuous century is personified in the story of Sashenka, born to rich but estranged Jewish parents, who rebels to become a Bolshevik in her teens.

Cared for by a loving English nanny, she will see the Communists gain power and later marry an intelligence officer close to Stalin's inner group.

When she and her husband fall foul of Stalin, whose spies have learned Sashenka is having an affair, their children, a girl nicknamed Snowy, and a boy, Carlo, must be secretly sent away. Soon, Sashenka and her husband, like so many loyal citizens, will be tortured and killed.

The harrowing interrogation scenes are revealed through archival transcripts, real if not actual.

'*I am a sincere Communist, Comrade Investigator*,' says Sashenka. '*I joined no oppositions. Never! I supported every policy of the Lenin-Stalin Party line… My life's been devoted to the Party.*'

By 1994, both of her children have grown up and the daughter, renamed Roza by her adoptive family, yearns to discover who her parents were, and what their fate was. Living between London and Moscow, where her son is part of the new Russian mega-rich, she engages a talented young researcher, Katinka, to embark on a quest that continues to occupy countless Russian families.

BOOK GIVEAWAY

WRITTEN with respected sports writer Neil Cadigan, *When Silver is Gold* (NEW HOLLAND $29.95) is breaststroker Brooke Hanson's story.

Honest, sometimes controversial and inspiring – Brooke details how she nearly drowned twice as a toddler, and takes the reader through to the regime of Olympic training.

She tells of the scandals in the sport where "baseless lies" almost cost careers, that famous Medley muddle, drugs in sport, almost being electrocuted in a promotion – winning and losing – and why she eventually called it quits.

There is also personal heartache including having to deal with her father's heart attack.

Brooke's story provides an insider's view into Olympic preparation – and finding love.

win win win

Clarence Life book competition

Clarence Life **has three copies of this book to give away. To enter fill out the coupon and name the swim stroke that Brooke is famous for. Drop your entry into** *The Daily Examiner* **by next Wednesday. Winners will be announced in next week's** *Clarence Life*.

Name: .....

Address: .....

Phone: .....

Answer: .....

WINNER: The winner of last week's book *High Potential* **was won by K Brookes of Junction Hill. Prizes can be collected from your nearest** *Daily Examiner/Coastal Views* **office.**

Aaron and Morgan listening to sounds as part of their treatment.

A mother reads to her autistic son while Kay watches on.

Kay Distel hopes to bring the Tomatis system, a holistic program for children with learning difficulties, to the Clarence Valley.

LAURETTA GODBEE INTERVIEWS KAY DISTEL

the big read

Listen and learn

LEFT AND BOTTOM: Some of the clay models made by the children as part of the therapy.

Kay Distel has transformed dozens of children's (and adult's) lives through the magic of sound

Kay Distel believes in miracles. She has seen dozens of them.

Every time a child with autism, aspergers, downs syndrome, dyslexia or an attention deficit disorder responds to her treatment programs, Kay sees another little miracle.

Kay is a highly trained body psychotherapist, her speciality the use of the Tomatis system, where sound, in particular Gregorian chant or the music of Mozart, is used as a conditioning agent to improve the skills of listening and communicating.

The system was devised half a century ago by a French ear, nose and throat specialist, Dr AA Tomatis, who recognised the importance of listening rather than hearing, and concluded that failure to listen played a major role in inability to communicate.

His system, with its holistic approach, was initially ignored or downplayed by conventional western medicine but over the years has won growing acceptance and recognition worldwide.

Kay Distel, who trained in the UK and the US, is now based in Brisbane with an extensive private practice involving individual and group programs, mainly with children who have learning or behavioural problems.

She has worked extensively there with autistic and ADHD children. "Our program can transform the way children learn," she says. "Worldwide it has a 95 per cent success rate, delivering improvement for these children."

And improvement can come quickly. Kay speaks of young clients unable to speak clearly, with unco-ordinated muscle movement and inability to concentrate their attention, showing noticeable improvement after only the first month of their course.

The entire course involves 60 hours of work in three sections spread over six months.

One of the unusual features of her work is the involvement of parents in the program.

"There is always a change but being able to maintain that change, to make it sustainable, that's what I am after," says Kay.

"The program provides a foundation on which the child can continue to learn to grow. The ear acts as a dynamo, providing us with the energy we need to survive and lead fulfilling lives."

"Once the program gets under way, mental health issues and hyperactivity will die down and the child will start learning. It's as though the child had been outside its body but now has come back into its body and is able to cope with emotions.

"If listening is distorted, information is incorrectly received and the desire to communicate is lacking. – we must relearn to listen and rekindle the desire to communicate."

Under the Tomatis system a phased program of auditory stimulation tunes up the muscles in the inner ear to become more flexible. The ears are stimulated to receive high frequency sound, which in turn fires the neurons which help change brain patterns, increasing the efficiency of information processing and concentration.

"There is an important difference between hearing and listening," says Kay Distel. "Hearing is involuntary and is affected by our physiological capabilities. A punctured ear drum or damage to the auditory nerve can create hearing problems.

"On the other hand listening problems are mostly voluntary and not conscious. Listening to make sense of the sounds we hear can involve both physical and motivational aspects that reduce understanding, learning and communication.

"For example, birth trauma, painful separation, sibling rivalry, bad school experiences or a history of severe ear infections are life events which may change a person's willingness to listen and be selective in processing sound."

By no means all Kay Distel's clients are children and not all are treated with Tomatis's methods, although his basic precepts form the infrastructure of most of Kay's work.

Workers in noisy occupations and those of advancing years are likely to experience hearing loss but Kay says more and more young professionals in high pressure jobs are exhibiting signs of what has been dubbed "the executive ear, — listening is affected by continuous pressure and overwork.

"Behaviours such as distractibility, fidgeting, wandering attention, mood swings and impulsive decision making indicate a listening function that is becoming selective, narrow, rigid and tired.

"Energy levels drop and burn-out, depression or tinnitus can be an outcome. A Tomatis program can retrain the ear to recharge itself by improving the use of the high frequencies, releasing inner tensions and bringing the person to a new desire to open their communication."

Janet is in middle age, one of Kay Distel's longest-term clients.

Originally concerned about a perceived hearing loss, she read about Dr Tomatis work and "thought it might help me.

"But mine turned out to be a very different challenge. I learned much more about how by listening, or not listening, I had made things more difficult for myself in my life.

"I had comprehension problems that I had never realised I had."

Janet and Kay are still working on those in regular structured two-hour sessions, — "I find the sessions of immense benefit. I always come away feeling much renewed," Janet says.

It is Kay Distel's dream to bring her operation which goes by the snappy title, 'Sound Education', to be based fulltime in Grafton.

Currently she is dividing her time between Brisbane "where my business and my living are" and Grafton "where my heart is".

She has already set up a home-stay business in South Grafton, which she sees ultimately as providing respite or back-up accommodation for group clients, and has a workshop in adjoining premises where she runs programs or is available for assessments and consultations.

Grafton Community College is sponsoring a series of free information sessions on Kay and her work in the second half of this year or more details are available through her web address *www.soundeducation.com.au*

She would very much like to move to Grafton full time "utilising my work for the benefit of the community here."

The need, she knows, already exists.

"I don't see myself working here with individuals – the ones who need the help the most are always the ones who can least afford it," she says.

"I would like to see my work in Grafton more community-based, for groups of the elderly, disabled or those with learning difficulties.

"When I was working in England we set up a day centre with other stake-holders and an advisory group and ideally I would like to see some local voluntary organisations take over the running of a project with me in Grafton."

Contacts she has already made in Grafton have convinced her that there are many families in the area "with problems that are not being solved.

"Disturbed children who don't get sufficient input early enough to make the changes that need to be made to turn their lives around." ■

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