think the book’s description of how it feels to dance professionally was a combination of my imagination and my knowledge of being on stage, in college plays or for a reading. And though I never danced in any serious way, I have read so many dancers’ memoirs. One that was particularly helpful was I, Maya Plisetskaya. She’s just a fascinating, powerful personality — she’s still alive — and the reader admires her so much.

One of the two alternating stories in Russian Winter is based in Stalin-era Moscow, which you describe in lush sensory detail. Did you go to Russia for research?
I went to Russia after I knew the book was pretty much done. Moscow has changed so much since the period I was writing about, so I was worried that if I went to contemporary Moscow, it would really throw me off. I loved it. It was May and June, and people were really helpful. I felt how incredibly large the city is, and I was able to find some of the streets and buildings I’d written about.

Will the book be published in Russia?
The Russian translation is being done through a publisher in Ukraine. The book rights have been sold in many other countries, but the actual Russian publishing houses weren’t excited about the topic. Why would they want to read about this horrible time?

Are you of Russian descent?
I’m Hungarian. I have family in Hungary, but my father fled to Canada after the failed revolution of 1956. It’s one of those stories you sense he doesn’t want to talk about. As a child I was curious and asked questions, but I really didn’t comprehend what he’d been through. Then, some time in my adulthood I was with my father somewhere, flipping TV channels, and there was a scene of people running through the woods to get over a border, and I saw my father’s face, and he said, “Oh, that’s what we did.”

The characters are so well formed. I loved the octogenarian dancer, Nina, and was especially intrigued by the character of Grigori, the rumpled, old-world immigrant professor and widower whom fate surprises. Is he based on someone you know?
With almost every character I write, there’s someone I may not know, but I’ve glimpsed. I don’t know where Grigori came from. I started writing him as a much older, more curmudgeonly character. But I realized I didn’t want him to be that person, so I renegotiated his qualities. I will say that the character Zoltan is based on an actual poet I know. And the old Nina is based on my Hungarian grandmother and in some ways is exactly like her.

How long did it take to write Russian Winter?
The actual focused reading, writing, and thinking about it was six years. I wrote a story about this in the summer of 2000. It was much too long, messy, and complicated to be a story, but I tried for three years to force it into story form. Then in the fall of 2003, when I was putting my story collection together, someone said this one should be a novel, and I knew it was true.

What writers influence you?
Tolstoy is my favorite novelist, and I love the stories of Chekhov. I tend to love British women writers, including Hilary Mantel, Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark. Two of my favorite novels of the last few years are The Known World by Edward P. Jones, and The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai.

Russian Winter would make a wonderful movie. Any interest in that?
I did get some communication about a movie. We’re looking into it.
their enchanted pair of jeans, *Three Wishes* is in large part a testament to the enduring power of women’s friendships.

But the book is also a case study of the evolving perceptions of what it means to be a mother, to have a family, and to find happiness. At the time, Ferdinand and Goldberg were reporters, Ferdinand for the *Boston Globe* and Goldberg for the *New York Times,* and Jones, a graduate of BU’s Creative Writing Program, was working as a freelance writer and educator in the wake of a painful divorce. Each woman realized her high-flying career left little time to make having a baby a priority. But their tale, Jones says, eschews the Janus-faced caricature of the single professional as coldhearted ladder-climber or hormone-crazed spinster.

“The stuff in sitcoms, soap operas — we defy that,” she says. “We’re three professional women who recognize that by helping each other, we’re only going to help ourselves as well.”

And perhaps most important to the book’s female readers, it’s true. “It’s hopeful, and it’s real,” according to Jones. “It’s not as if we’re manufacturing a fairy tale.”

Their story of a quirky, hard-working happy ending struck a nerve in the book world: a week after the three found an agent for their manuscript, they lined up meetings with five different publishers.

“We recognize that ours is not a typical story,” Jones says with a laugh.

It’s hard to know if she’s referring to the authors’ reportedly hefty advance or their unorthodox road to motherhood. She speaks with determined optimism: if you will it, they (in this case, babies) will come.

“I don’t necessarily want to call it magic,” she says, “but there is a power in making decisions and choosing things, rather than sitting back and waiting for them to happen.”

But *Three Wishes* offers no miracle cure for unhappiness. The book is a straightforward account of an agonizing decision to have a baby alone and the freeing power of that choice. Jones and her friends achieve their goals, but that doesn’t mean they don’t suffer along the way.

Jones in particular endures heartbreak, starting with the messy unraveling of her first marriage: her husband leaves her for her twenty-one-year-old personal trainer (although she prevails with a $10 million divorce settlement).

“We can say that there’s a bit of an element of revenge in it,” she says of writing about the divorce. Later, Jones meets her eventual second husband, Phil, she learns months into her first pregnancy that the fetus has Down’s syndrome, and she undergoes an abortion.

Jones, Ferdinand, and Goldberg remain “deep and supporting” friends and business partners as they promote their book. Jones says. If nothing else, the experience has left a legacy for her now-five-year-old son.

“I have a book that’s basically about how much I wanted him,” she says. “I think I wrote it, whether or not I was conscious of it, with him in mind.”

Each woman realized her high-flying career left little time to make having a baby a priority.