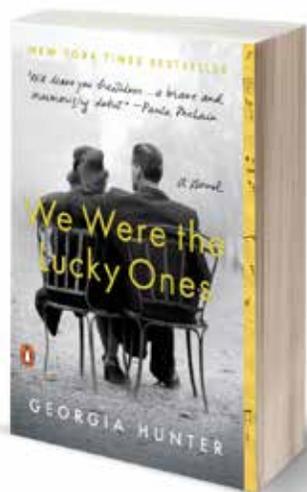


# Georgia Hunter, author of *“We Were the Lucky Ones”*

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*Georgia lives in Rowayton with her husband and two children. Sound Watch News recently sat down with her to talk about her book.*  
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BY LAUREN HENRY, ROWAYTON

At the age of 15, Georgia Hunter interviewed her maternal grandmother for a school assignment on her family's history. She discovered that her grandfather's family (his parents, his four siblings, their spouses and children), Jews originally from Poland, were Holocaust survivors. Ninety percent of Poland's Jews were exterminated during World War II, and in the town of Radom, where Georgia's relatives lived, fewer than 300 of the 300,000 Jewish residents managed to survive. "We Were the Lucky Ones" documents her family's incredible journey.

**LAUREN HENRY:** Thanks for taking the time to chat. "We Were the Lucky Ones" is a story of hardship, but also of determination and the power of love. It's such a moving and inspirational story. Why do you think it took until your teenage years before you learned about your family's history? And when did you know you wanted to write about it?

**GEORGIA HUNTER:** I had no idea growing up that my grandfather was Polish or Jewish; he just never talked about it. I made that discovery while interviewing my grandmother for a high school English assignment. I was 15 at the time; my grandfather had died the year before.

I wish I could go back and ask my grandfather why he never talked about his Holocaust-era past. Perhaps the fact that the entire family survived intact—there were 22 in all—played a part in that. They were a statistical anomaly, which is unbelievably fortunate but not something they'd have boasted about. More than that, though, it simply wasn't in my grandfather's DNA to dwell on the past. He had this very positive, vibrant, forward-thinking outlook on life. When he moved to the States, he changed his first name from Addy to Eddy,



his last name from Kurc (pronounced "Koortz" in Polish) to Courts. He was all about assimilating, becoming an American.

It was a surprise, to say the least, to learn about my grandfather's past at 15, but it wasn't until a family reunion six years later, in 2000, that I started hearing little bits and pieces of the greater Kurc family story. That reunion really planted the seed in my mind to try to unearth and record my ancestral past. I knew it would involve a lot of travel (the family is very global!), and a lot of research, which was daunting. But once I put a stake in the ground and set off for my first interview, I knew it was something I really wanted and needed to do. I went into the project as a family historian with the goal of honoring my relatives and capturing the story for the family, and for future generations.

**LH:** Can you tell us a little bit about your research?

**GH:** My mother is one of ten first cousins on her father's (Eddy's) side. I met with each of them, as they all had pieces of the stories their parents (my grandfather's siblings) had passed down to them. I was especially honored to sit down with Felicia, who was only a year old at the start of the war, and whose firsthand memories were heart-wrenching.

Along with these oral histories, I reached out to archives, ministries, museums—anywhere I hoped might have a relevant record. It's amazing how many records exist and how more and more are becoming available every day. If I had tried to tackle this research before the digital age, this book certainly wouldn't be what it is today. What I was able to find was remarkable. I encourage everyone to delve into their own histories, and in fact I have a page on my

website called “Ancestry Search Tips” if anyone is interested in digging into their history. You just never know what you’re going to find.

One of the holes in the family’s story was a lack of information about my great-uncle Genek—my grandfather’s older brother. He and his wife Herta were exiled to Siberia, where their son Jozef was born, but no one knew why they were sent to the gulag, or when. I ended up joining a Yahoo group for people with ties to Siberia in the war, and they in turn connected me with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, where I found a goldmine of answers in the form of a nine-page letter handwritten by Genek, detailing his story: how and why he and Herta were sent to Siberia, details of the gruesome trip there, how they discovered Herta was pregnant, the work, the suffering, and other details none of us had ever heard before, including Josef’s birth date, which he hadn’t known. When Genek was released from the gulag, he fought for the Allies, and thanks to the British Ministry of Defense, I also discovered that he had been awarded war medals during his time in the army that were still unclaimed. I was able to claim those medals, and pass them on to his family.

**LH:** With so many characters and story lines, how did you keep everything straight?

**GH:** Good question—it wasn’t easy! I went into my research thinking I’d have two story lines: that of my grandfather, who was living in France on his own when war broke out and managed to get to Brazil, and subsequently lost complete contact with everyone back in Europe; and then that of the rest of the family, who were in Poland at the start of the war. But as soon as I started digging, I realized that every sibling (and often their spouses and even children) had scattered—sometimes across continents—and that they each had their own stories to tell. I created a timeline, color coded by sibling, as a means of keeping track of where they were chronologically.

**LH:** The title is “We Were the Lucky Ones,” but do you think that’s all it was?

**GH:** A lot of people ask, “Were your relatives lucky?” And in a big sense, yes they were, because there were so many instances where their paths could have taken a terrible turn. Almost every one of Felica’s stories, for example, left me thinking, What if? Another example are my great-grandparents, Sol and Nechuma, who eventually went into hiding with a peasant family in the country. Somehow, no police came to the door and discovered them, no neighbor ratted them out. So yes, the family was lucky in that sense, but it wasn’t all luck, of course. The family always had a plan to get out of trouble. They were bold, they were smart, they learned languages easily, they constantly did everything in their power to stay one step ahead.

**LH:** Was this your first attempt at writing a book?

**GH:** Well, my father wrote a book that was published when I was five called “Softly Walks the Beast,” and I wrote my first book at the same time called “Charlie Walks the Beast,” so technically this would be number two!

**LH:** What was the process of actually getting your book published?

**GH:** Once I’d finally pulled together a manuscript, I kept it really close for a very long time. I shared it with my mother, my husband, and

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a friend who is also a writer. They each gave me great feedback, but I figured they had to, right? A girlfriend here in Rowayton who worked in publishing suggested I send my book to a freelance editor, and I did, on my own dime. That turned out to be the best decision ever, as the editor loved the book, so much so that she offered to pass it along to a few agents. One of those agents read it in a day, and when I met with her I knew she was “the one.”

**LH:** Has learning about your Jewish ancestry changed how you see yourself?

**GH:** Definitely. It’s helped me to put my own life challenges in perspective, and to understand who I am and why I am the way I am. Now I can clearly see the traits that have been passed down over the generations to my mother, to me,

to my kids—traits like courage, resourcefulness, and perseverance. Stubbornness, too! We are a fiercely determined lot.

I also feel closer than ever to my family, having spent so much time in their homes interviewing them. I know my mother’s cousins in a way I never would have, and in turn their parents (my grandfather’s siblings), most of whom I never had a chance to meet—I was able to channel them, in a way, through their children. And I can sense the love that they shared, and that we all still share today. All in all, it’s been an incredibly powerful and grounding experience.

**LH:** Have you considered writing a sequel?

**GH:** I do get asked that a lot, and to be honest I think the story is complete. Things calmed down considerably for the family after the war—thankfully!—and so I think there isn’t a need to write a sequel.

**LH:** We hear “We Were the Lucky Ones” might be optioned for TV. Is that true?

**GH:** Yes! A good friend of mine, Thomas Kail, is a very successful producer and director and he actually approached me to ask if he could work on it. We hired a screenwriter last spring to help us put together a pitch. The process has been fascinating. We’ve pitched to all the big networks in Los Angeles and are considering pitching in London as well. I hope that if it does get picked up it’s because the story resonates with someone and they feel like they have to do it, in the same way that I felt like I had to record the story. This has been a passion project from start to finish, and I can’t imagine approaching the screen version in any other way.

**LH:** You’re currently working on your next book. Can you tell us anything about it?

**GH:** Yes, this one will be historical fiction, also set in World War II, but in Italy and Greece. I think these are two countries with fascinating yet little-known Holocaust histories. The historical piece will be told from a young woman’s perspective, and it’ll be a story of friendship, motherhood, and survival. There will also be a more modern-day story line, told from the POV of a young mom who travels to her grandmother’s island home off of the coast of New England and who, over the course of a life-changing month, comes to learn the truth about her grandmother’s past. I’m in the thick of my research now, and I have a commitment to my publisher and actual deadlines, so I do feel a little bit of pressure, but it’s good to get back to writing!

Learn more about Georgia on her website [www.georgiahunterauthor.com](http://www.georgiahunterauthor.com)