

Close to Home East of Elmgrove

Honoring Their Stories

A native Rhode Islander takes a dark moment and turns it into a tale of love, persistence and hope

By Eliazabeth Rau

Most writers are terrified of the blank page. Not the Hunters, the father-daughter duo and former East Siders who know how to spin a yarn and then some.

Loyal readers might remember a column I wrote years ago about Tom Hunter and his book, *Memoirs of a Spaghetti Cowboy: Tales of Oddball Luck and Derring-Do*, which recalls his adventures starring in spaghetti Westerns while living in Rome. It was a bestseller in our house. We even received a signed copy from the author, who lived next door before moving to Connecticut with his wife, Isabelle, last year.

Now the Hunters' daughter, Georgia, is joining the family business. Georgia has just published a book based on the true story of her Polish Jewish relatives who were separated at the start of World War II and, through grit and ingenuity, survived to see each other again after nearly a decade apart. *We Were the Lucky Ones* has received glowing reviews, with critics and authors calling it "the most gripping novel... in years," "extraordinarily moving," and a "truly tremendous accomplishment." Librarians across the country selected the book as one of their top ten picks for February. One word: Wow.

Most writers struggle to get their first book published. The response to Georgia's debut was so overwhelming she had several bidders. The publisher, Viking, a division of Penguin Random House, is so impressed it has launched a marketing campaign that is taking Georgia, who also lives in Connecticut, to readings in New York City and throughout New England.

The 38-year-old novelist will return to her old stomping grounds at 6:30 p.m., March 9, for a reading and conversation at the Sopkin Auditorium at Miriam Hospital. Sponsored by the Miriam Hospital Women's Association, the event is free and open to the public. I expect a huge crowd; RSVP before March 2 by emailing MFerreira@Lifespan.org or calling 793-2520. Books on the Square will sell books at the event, and Georgia, of course, will be there to sign them.

The backstory behind the book is just as compelling as the novel. As Georgia



reveals on her beautifully written website, WeWereTheLuckyOnes.com, she was 15 years old when she learned that she came from a family of Holocaust survivors. So began her journey to unearth her family's history. In a way, Georgia started the project as a student at Moses Brown, from which she graduated in 1996. Georgia's English teacher, Ransom Griffin, asked students to research and write about their ancestral pasts. Georgia chose her paternal grandfather - Addy Kurc in the book. Her grandfather had passed away by then, and there was only so much her grandmother could tell her. Years later, after attending a 32-member Kurc family reunion on Martha's Vineyard, Georgia was more eager than ever to press on, or, as she puts it, "Write these stories down."

One summer day 16 years ago, not long after graduating from the University of Virginia, Georgia sat down with her mother at their Irving Avenue house and told her she wanted to write a book about her Papa's family. Isabelle was thrilled and handed her a black binder - stuffed with photos, letters and newspaper clippings - that she had put together after her father died in 1993.

Carrying a digital recorder and moleskin notebook, Georgia spent years retracing the Kurc family

odyssey, traveling thousands of miles to France, Brazil, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and Italy, sometimes accompanied by her husband, Robert Farinholt, and their now-5-year-old son, Wyatt. The novel is historical fiction, but inspired by the harrowing tales of her grandfather, his parents and his four siblings who were scattered from Poland to North Africa, the Middle East and the Americas, enduring unimaginable hardships: a Siberian gulag; a daring escape from a Polish ghetto; brutal prisons; Vichy-occupied Morocco; long treks on foot across the Alps while pregnant.

Ninety percent of Poland's 3 million Jews died in the Holocaust, and of the 30,000 who lived in the Kurc family's hometown of Radom, Poland, fewer than 300 survived. That horrifying fact should make us all weep. The book's title comes from a touching remark a relative made to Georgia about beating the odds: "It's a miracle in many ways. We were the lucky ones."

Bring the entire family to Georgia's March 9 reading at Miriam. It's an opportunity for all to learn about the power of persistence, hope and love.

Elizabeth Rau can be reached at ERau1@verizon.net.