



GEORGIA HUNTER FARINHOLT '96

Search for Survival

Map by Ryan Mitchell

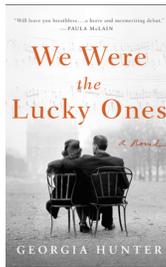


To learn more about Georgia's journey in discovering and recording her family's past, or to get tips for your own ancestry research, visit her website at georgiahunterauthor.com.

Georgia Hunter Farinholt was a junior in Ransom Griffin's English class when, thanks to her I-Search assignment, she sat down for an interview with her grandmother and learned that she was a quarter Jewish, and that she came from a family of Holocaust survivors. The discovery sparked an array of questions, and a thirst for answers. In 2008, she set off to uncover her family's remarkable story, traveling across the globe to interview relatives, dig up records, and retrace her ancestors' footsteps through Europe and South America. Over the course of nearly a decade, Georgia's I-Search-inspired research evolved into a 400-page novel.

We Were the Lucky Ones, published in February by Viking, follows Georgia's grandfather, his parents, and his siblings — a family of Polish Jews — as they scatter at the start of the Second World War, determined to survive, and to reunite. While one sibling is forced into exile in Siberia, another works grueling hours in the ghetto factory, and others risk their lives by hiding as Gentiles under the noses of the Germans. Georgia's grandfather, Addy, managed to flee the continent for Brazil, where he lived out the remainder of the war without knowing whether he'd ever again see his parents and siblings.

Georgia says that the idea to write the book was seeded at a family reunion on Martha's Vineyard. Thirty-two Kurc descendants came, some from as far away as Brazil, France, and Israel. "I was 21," Georgia says, "and it was at that reunion that I began overhearing stories about the family that I couldn't quite fathom — a son born in the Siberian gulag, a secret wedding in Russian-occupied Poland, a hike over the Austrian Alps, a sister's attempt to escape the ghetto with her three-year-old daughter in tow." Georgia says she'll never forget the comment her great-aunt Felicia (who was a year old at the start of WWII) made one night. "The cousins had been telling stories," Geor-



Viking

gia says, "and at one point Felicia leaned in and said, 'It's a miracle, really, that we're all here...we were the lucky ones.'"

Georgia claims the hardest part about writing her book was the patience it required: "My family history is complicated and remote. It took years to unearth. At times, I felt overwhelmed and discouraged — I had to learn to appreciate each small step forward."

Georgia's own roadmap started in Plainville, Massachusetts where she grew up. "I've always loved to write," she says. She penned her first "novel" at age four, and at eleven, she pitched an opinion piece to the local newspaper. Since her debut in the *Attleboro Sun Chronicle*, her personal essays and photos have been featured in places like *The New York Times*, *travelgirl* magazine, and on *Equitrekking.com*. She also works as a freelance copywriter for adventure travel publications.

Recalling her experience at MB, Georgia says that the school pushed her to look outward: "MB was a place where I felt I could be myself. My classes were tough but my teachers were engaging and passionate about the subjects they taught. MB taught me to be curious, to take risks, and to challenge myself."

Georgia gets asked often whether she will continue to write, now that her book has been published. Her answer is yes, and that she will likely stick with historical fiction. "I find stories based on real people and actual events inspiring," she says. "I love an underdog protagonist — someone faced with terrible odds, whose story offers a big-picture understanding of a place or time with which you might be unfamiliar."

We Were the Lucky Ones, ranked #18 at publication on the Indie Bestseller list, continues to receive rave reviews — it was named one of the "Books You Need to Read" by *Harper's Bazaar*, and described as one of the "Best Books to Read in 2017" by *Glamour*.