

Finding my Grandfather's Secret - Carolinda Witt

I did a workshop with Amanda three years ago after I discovered the identity of my grandfather. My mother never knew who her father was, she had been told the name on her birth certificate was fictitious. It turned out to be his real name, although he had at least ten other aliases. As I tracked him down, I discovered he had been a spy in WW1 and a Double Agent sent into Germany during WW2. He married six times (two of them bigamously) and had six children, all of whom never knew about the other. He was also a notorious international swindler who died in suspicious circumstances when he was only 57 years old.

Sadly my mother had died only ten days earlier before I found out the name of her father. The man she had never met, or knew anything about. I wish I could have told her.

After the workshop I was confused about whether to write a memoir or a non-fiction book, so I joined Amanda's 12 in 12 Programme and she gave me valuable feedback on my writing skills as I progressed. It was great to have the flexibility to produce either version of my story, because the amount of research I had to do was enormous. She was able to help me with questions that readers would ask, and to help me achieve simplicity with a very complex story. Due to my unfamiliarity with the subject of espionage, I often veered off topic into background material, which I thought were important, but which Amanda helped me realise that this took people away from my story rather than immersing them into the narrative - which was invaluable.

I went through a lot emotionally with this story. My grandfather was an odd mix of a hero and a cad and, at one point, I really didn't like him and found it hard to write about him. Amanda helped me realise that this story was part of history and should be told.

Through my contacts and research, an internationally acclaimed writer on espionage contacted me, and told me he had tried unsuccessfully to find my grandfather and more or less welcomed me to 'the family.'

I was about to head off to London and he suggested we meet. When I told Amanda that I had rejected his overtures as I was worried he would borrow from my material, she was stunned and pointed out this writer's name would add credibility to my book, and would probably guarantee finding a publisher! We both laugh about this now!

I did contact him, and we met in London recently. We spent three engrossing hours talking about spies, including my grandfather. He was more than willing to assist me in research, contacts, finding a publisher and even offered to write a Foreword for my book when I have a completed manuscript.

There is a long way to go but I know where I'm going - and I will get there.

Carolinda Witt