

The author and the spy



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Is it easy to write a book? No – and yes – is the answer. There are certain rules which this author has imposed upon herself. 'Do not stop writing at the end of a chapter since that makes restarting a harder job' is one of them and 'do not make yourself feel too guilty about handing over your childcare' is another. She admits that all working mothers share this latter feeling but she mitigates it by including the school run in her working day. She hopes that her girls will be proud of her.

Clare Mulley is an author who lives in the oldest part of Saffron Walden with her husband, Ian Wolter, their three lively (and lovely) daughters, 11, 9 and 4 years old, and an au pair. The latter keeps the show on the road whilst Clare becomes ever more engrossed in her writing and Ian throws himself into his degree in arts at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and his sculpture classes with Anne Curry. He also keeps a weather eye on business interests in the City. Ian's sculpture shows no sign of being the work of a beginner and Clare's books have the air of academia about them. When she laid down her pen in April 2012 at the end of her latest book it signified the end of two years of intensive research on a subject which had become an all absorbing mission for her. And it is an all absorbing book

Entitled 'The Spy Who Loved' the words make a tantalising and probably not accidental reference to the fictional spy, James Bond who this year celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of his first film outing. There is, however, only a hint of a connection as there is no concrete evidence that Ian Fleming and Christine

Granville (Clare's Spy) ever did meet even though there are lots of dates and places where they could easily have overlapped. Fleming is certainly quoted as speaking admiringly of Christine and

there is every possibility that she inspired his portrayal of the alluring female spies in his tales. Christine Granville was a very real person, famous in her own time and among her Polish compatriots as a fearless secret agent in the Second World War and an aristocratic beauty to boot! Her outstanding and generally hair-raising feats of courage and derring-do and her ability to think and act fast under pressure were legendary. Clare became utterly caught up in her subject and amused her girls with 'Christine stories' on long car journeys as one adventure after another floated into focus during the detailed research which was fast taking over her life.

Clare has already written one successful biography, 'The Woman Who Saved the Children' which details the life of Eglantyne Jebb, the controversial founder of the Charity 'Save the Children'. Her current agent is the well known Andrew Lownie and it was he who suggested that she write a new biography of the once famous but now all but forgotten Christine Granville. This was not her only name but one of her many assumed personae in the course of her war work. She was born Krystyna Skarbek, to Polish parents, both of them Roman Catholics. Her mother came from an eminent and wealthy Jewish family. This last fact sometimes worked against Christine in the undercurrent of anti-Semitism which prevailed at the time and she often found herself on the edge of acceptance by aristocratic groups or when in the centre of Diplomatic intrigue. She was brought up on a prosperous estate deep in the countryside where she developed her deep love of animals – dogs and horses in particular – and became an excellent skier. She was twice married, to Poles, but ended her life living under her assumed name in the rather run down Shelbourne Hotel, Kensington, among the flotsam and jetsam of Polish émigrés – many of them war heroes who could also sadly no longer return to their beloved Poland now in Communist grip. She continued to dazzle and attract admirers a British one of whom stabbed her to death. He was tried, found guilty



'Ian, Clare's husband, keeps encouraging her to write a best seller. Perhaps she just has.'

of the crime and afterwards hanged. Christine had been just forty four years old.

This seemed like a pretty good subject but it came with a time limit of two years. Clare accepted this challenge. For the past twenty-four months she has inhabited archives, requested hitherto secret documents now become accessible under the Freedom of

Information Act, followed up every lead, met the descendants of close associates of Christine, read her letters to them, handled her jewellery and spent time in Poland with an interpreter to try to trace the intricate pattern of Christine's wartime life. The book is referenced and annotated on every page so that each and every incident can be tracked back to its source for verification. Since there are many twists and turns in the story and the Polish names are a complete tongue twister to read (even in one's head) it at times feels more like an exam simply to follow in which country and with which lover the current scenario is taking place! Clare rattles off the names fluently in her 'speed speak' manner. She tells of staying in a flat in reconstructed Old Warsaw belonging to a Count Ledochowski (son of Christine's lover of the same name). The elder Count had written an unpublished memoir of Christine which Clare was allowed to read – a moving and

enlightening experience. Still wrapped up in those powerful and evocative tales Clare ventured out of the front door of the flat only to find an officer in Gestapo uniform pressing the barrel of his machine gun into her. She experienced a flash of sheer terror such as she imagined Christine would have had many a time and wondered if she were in the middle of a 'time slip'. But no, it happened that the street was being used as the set for a World War II film and, unable to read the Polish notices warning occupants not to emerge into the street that day, she had inadvertently stepped straight into a movie!

Clare's background is not directly that of a writer. She has a degree from Sheffield University in Politics and History and later took a Masters in Social and Cultural History at Birkbeck College, London. She had spent six weeks in Poland teaching English as a foreign language so was already drawn to the country but can only speak a few

words of Polish herself. The story of the fascinating femme fatale Christine fast enveloped her and she has managed to pass that enthusiasm on to the reader in spite of the academic annotations and references she has been compelled to add in order to authenticate the story. The decision was taken to anglicise only Christine's name as that was the one she proudly adopted after the War and was on her death certificate but all other names of places and people are left in their Polish form – a fair challenge to the proof readers! Of her work on the book Clare says simply "I lived it, I loved it". The research was an adventure for her and she went all over Poland and France retracing her heroine's steps. The book has been very well reviewed, is being translated into Chinese and, a great compliment to Clare, into Polish as well and will be published in America in 2013. Ian, Clare's husband, keeps encouraging her to write a best-seller. Perhaps she just has. **NN**



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