



Family of Spies by Christine Kuehn

Martin County Library System Book Discussion Kit:

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Included in the Kit:

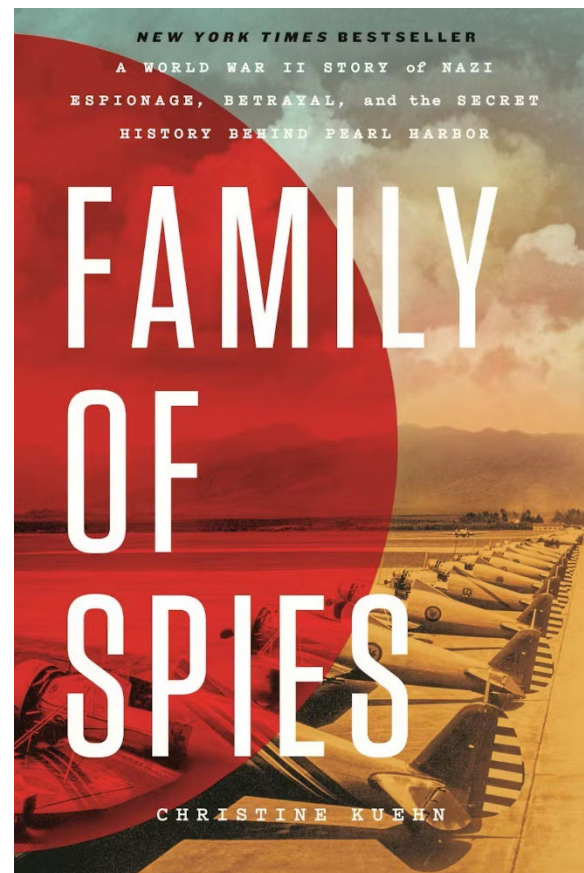
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Book summary

A propulsive, never-before-told story of one family's shocking involvement as Nazi and Japanese spies during WWII and the pivotal role they played in the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

It began with a letter from a screenwriter, asking about a story. *Your family. World War II. Nazi spies.* Christine Kuehn was shocked and confused. When she asked her seventy-year-old father, Eberhard, what this could possibly be about, he stalled, deflected, demurred, and then wept. He knew this day would come.

The Kuehns, a prominent Berlin family, saw the rise of the Nazis as a way out of the hard times that had befallen them. When the daughter of the family, Eberhard's sister, Ruth, met Nazi leader Joseph Goebbels at a party, the two hit it off, and they had an affair. But Ruth has a secret – she was half Jewish – and Goebbels found out. Rather than having Ruth killed, Goebbels instead sent the entire Kuehn family to Hawaii, to work as spies half a world away. There, Ruth and her parents established an intricate spy operation from their home, just a few miles down the road from Pearl Harbor, shielding Eberhard from the truth. They passed secrets to the Japanese, leading to the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor. After Eberhard's father was





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arrested and tried for his involvement in planning the assault, Eberhard learned the harsh truth about his family and faced a decision that would change the path of the Kuehn family forever.

Jumping back and forth between Christine discovering her family's secret and the untold past of the spies in Germany, Japan, and Hawaii, *Family of Spies* is fast-paced history at its finest and will rewrite the narratives of December 7, 1941.

(Source: <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781250344465/familyofspies/>)





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Meet the Author

Christine Kuehn was cocooned in the sanctity of a quiet suburban life when a mysterious letter in 1994 pierced that bubble, sending her on a thirty-year quest to discover the truth behind a horrendous family secret kept hidden for half a century. Following a career in journalism, public relations, and nonprofits, Christine now lives in Maryland with her husband, close to their three grown children.

(Source: <https://us.macmillan.com/author/christinekuehn>)





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Discussion Questions

1. Imagine discovering a buried secret about your own family that is both horrific and essential to everyone's understanding of important historic events. How would you react? What would you do with that information? Would you rather know or not know?
2. What piece of the story that Christine Kuehn uncovered surprised you the most?
3. There were so many moving pieces and moments that seemed like chance, such as Otto's not getting the job and being sent to Hawaii instead. Would history look different if they picked Otto instead of Heydrich for the original job in Germany and sent a different family to Hawaii? Would more Jews have survived the concentration camps? Would there even be concentration camps? And do you think these kinds of questions are valuable and worth discussing? (Suggested by Tides n' Tales Book Club, Long Island, NY)
4. Did it surprise you that this was the family chosen by the Nazi party to liaise with the Japanese in Hawaii? What do you make of their lavish spending and the early detection by the FBI? Do you think they believed they'd complete their mission? Do you think they knew they would be caught and detained if they did?
5. Discuss Friedel's motivations. How do you think Friedel's past relationships with men and loss of money by Otto contributed to her ease of becoming a spy? How do you think she dealt with the fact that Ruth was half Jewish, while her oldest son was a high-ranking Nazi? (Suggested by Horrors Not Whores Book Club, Champaign, IL)
6. What do you think drove Ruth's participation in the espionage? In particular, what do you make of her relationship with Joseph Goebbels, her activities courting military officers, and her letter to her brother from the concentration camp? What do you imagine were her motivations? Can you see any changes between Ruth in the FBI files and the Ruth that Christine met later?
7. Why do you think Ruth and Friedel were not prosecuted as Otto was? (Suggested by Boynton Sunday Ladies Book Club, Boynton Beach, FL)
8. Christine Kuehn's father, Eberhard, makes the decision to walk away from his family. Both Eberhard and Ruth decided to live the remainder of their lives in the United States by compartmentalizing their memories and past history. Do you think you could also walk away from your family, their actions, and their history? How do we rationalize our choices and decisions in life? (Suggested by Grant Avenue Book Club, Kensington, MD)
9. Think about the family's time in Hawaii. Can you imagine yourself living among neighbors for years knowing you will betray them? Does it call to mind stories



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you've heard in the news about spies being found in the U.S. living quietly among neighbors without raising suspicion? What do you think it takes to participate in such a mission?

10. The author writes about taking a break from researching this book for many years. Do you feel it should be up to each person to decide whether they come forward with important information that they uncover, or do we all have a responsibility to tell the truth, even if it is painful?

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Recipes

German Potato Salad

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds red potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- ½ pound bacon, cut into 1/2- inch dice
- ¾ cup finely minced yellow onion
- 1/3 cup white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 1 tablespoon whole grain Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley leaves
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh chives



Directions:

Place potatoes and 1 tablespoon salt in a large pot and cover with cold water until water level is 1 inch above potatoes. Set over medium-high heat until boiling. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until a paring knife can be inserted into potatoes with no resistance, 10-15 minutes. Strain potatoes and set aside.

While potatoes are cooking, place bacon in a large skillet and cook over medium-high heat until crisp. Remove bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving as much rendered fat in the pan as possible. Pour out all but about 3 tablespoons of fat from pan.

Add onions to pan with bacon fat and cook over medium heat until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a small bowl, whisk together vinegar, sugar, mustard, 2 teaspoons of salt, and pepper to make the dressing.

Place potatoes, bacon, onions, parsley and chives in a large bowl. Add dressing and toss gently to combine. Let sit for 10-15 minutes to allow flavors to meld. Serve while still warm.

(Source: <https://www.serious-eats.com/german-potato-salad/>)

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Recipes Continuation

Haupia (Hawaiian Coconut Pudding)

Ingredients:

- ½ cup water
- 5 tablespoons cornstarch
- 13 ounces unsweetened coconut milk, (full fat ONLY)
- ¼ cup sugar

Directions:

Combine cornstarch and water in a small bowl. Stir until cornstarch is dissolved the set aside.



In a medium-sized saucepan over medium heat, combine coconut milk and sugar. Whisk constantly until mixture begins to simmer.

While continuing to whisk, SLOWLY pour in the water/cornstarch mixture until it thickens. Reduce heat to low and continue to whisk until you have a thick, pudding-like consistency. This is important, it needs to be thickened while it is heating, or it won't set up.

Pour into a greased 8"x8" baking dish or square containers. Allow to cool to room temperature, about 10-15 minutes, then cover and refrigerate for 2+ hours.

When ready to serve, cut into 2" squares and serve cold. If serving as a custard or pudding, pour into individual serving ramekins or bowls and chill.

(Source: <https://www.favfamilyrecipes.com/haupia/>)