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H.L. Goodall, Jr.

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# My Family Secret

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My mother had a secret. Well, *more than* one secret. But the one secret that organized the rest was that her husband—my father—was a spy. He worked, as she always put it, “for the government.”

My father also had a secret. Not only that he worked for the government. He was a spy who harbored a dark suspicion about his boss in the CIA: The boss was preventing a dangerous Soviet spy from being outed because it would have ruined the boss’s career.

My father’s boss was James Jesus Angleton, the longest serving director of counter-intelligence in the history of the United States. The Soviet spy was Harold Adrian “Kim” Philby, who, in fact, turned out to be exactly what my father who worked for the government said he was, a Soviet spy. Not just “a spy”; Kim Philby was the most notorious Soviet spy in Cold War history. When Philby defected in July of 1963, he was declared a Hero of the Soviet Union. By then he had caused the deaths of hundreds of allied agents and informers and compromised the whole of the counter-intelligence operations of the United States and Great Britain.

Angleton, so far as I know, never forgave my father for pressing his suspicions, despite having himself been dead wrong about Philby.

My father never forgave Angleton, for all the good it didn’t do his career. Or the good it didn’t do in our family.

But until my father died and left me his diary and a copy of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, he never disclosed his secrets. It was until after his death that I began to know what had gone wrong for him, for me, and for our family. And by then it was too late.

That was 30 years ago. Another time and place and in the middle of it another enduring war.

My book is a history lesson and a cautionary tale.

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*A Need to Know: The Clandestine History of a CIA Family* is also a family story—my family’s story—and an account of our code of secrecy (Goodall, 2006). It is also a story about our country, about our intelligence organizations, and the relationship of the cold war culture of secrecy, fear, and surveillance to the current culture of secrecy, fear, and surveillance known as (select your favorite symbolic label, one that makes you feel more safe and/or secure) the war on terror, the global war on terror, or—more recently—our enduring war.

It is a story told by those of us who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in nuclear families where “what Daddy did” was never discussed openly, much less honestly. It would have been bad for their careers, which is to say for our lives.

Yet I wonder about the longer-term costs to the women and men, to the families, keeping those secrets. And I wonder about the cost to our nation when our leaders use national security interests to create a cult of secrecy reinforced by a code of loyalty where any dissent, any speaking out, any questioning of the wisdom of decisions is disallowed and deemed unpatriotic and disloyal.

\* \* \*

Secrets are said to be necessary to the conduct of intelligence and perhaps that is so. But a cult of secrecy exists not as a unique state of being outside of human affairs but instead as a real tension between that which secrecy enables and that which secrecy constrains.

A cult of secrecy enables power and commands loyalty but constrains the dissemination of reliable information necessary for an informed electorate to operate reasonably in a representative democratic society. For some democratically elected and appointed officials as well as run-of-the-mill tyrants and dictators, secrecy and loyalty that beget power are serious political intoxicants; they create a collective sense of distinct superiority (knowledge *is* power, after all) while enabling a dangerous lack of accountability for the resulting lies, cover-ups, arrogance, stupidity, greed, and more lies that the need for secrecy inspires. As Frederick Hitz, former CIA Inspector General, expresses it in *The Great Game* (Hitz, 2004), “absolute secrecy corrupts absolutely.”

Indeed.

“Absolute” reaches all the way down into the families of agents and operators. It also reaches all the way up into the highest reaches of administrative and political power.

\* \* \*

Do you doubt me? I doubt you do.

But for those who may doubt me, let's examine the recent historical record.

*There were no weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq.* The CIA knew it and probably so did MI-5. George W. Bush knew it, Tony Blair knew it, Dick Cheney knew it, Donald Rumsfeld knew it, and Condoleezza Rice knew it. How could they not? The intelligence was clear and the evidence irrefutable. We know it *now*, but it is too late in the game to count for more than bragging rights at dinner parties. The secret the cultists had to keep under an oath of loyalty was simple: that there were in fact no WMDs in Iraq.

The resulting lie that required mere media perpetration was perhaps too easy. All that a president, a prime minister, various officials of both governments, and a variety of pundits had to repeat was the fear-inducing spell: There *are* WMDs in Iraq. It was a lie. A damned lie. An absolute lie.

Lies, damn lies, and absolute lies fed by a desire for war and warranted by a culture of secrecy. The times were uncertain and anxiety ruled. Anxiety, already rampant in our post-9/11 cultures, already fueled by an overheated rhetoric of impending terrorist threats and already visualized by a daily dose of color-coded threat levels that were, like our heartbeats, already elevated. The surest communicative cure for a perpetual state of high anxiety is certainty, however false, preferably articulated by a person in a position of authority, however stolen. So we heard *there are WMDs in Iraq*.

"We must," the President and his cult of loyal cronies said, "go to war." Tony Blair, too, felt the need for war for reasons that are part of a "special relationship" between our countries but seemed more like some kind of backroom political deal. An international coalition of lesser states, who were probably promised money in exchange for their dead, acquiesced.

The anxious, relieved by a familiar narrative of war fought by someone else less fortunate than themselves and a coalition of countries they couldn't name if life depended on it, breathed a collective sigh of cultural relief.

There are secrets and then there is the cult of **SECRECY**.

The war in Iraq was justified *not* by the need for intelligence organizations to keep secrets, because they didn't keep what they knew secret from our president, but by a cult of **SECRECY**. In a cult of secrecy, he or she who dares tell the truth is guilty of disloyalty rather than a champion of truth or democracy.

And those who are disloyal are traitors. Traitors to the *lie*.

I know. I grew up in a family where my father was "disloyal" because he told the truth. From my mother's point of view, and now from my own, he was a patriot. From James Angleton's point of view, his disloyalty, his

questioning of a superior officer, his creation of a file that provided evidence of his assertions about Philby—well, no matter.

That questioning of a decision, that act of so-called disloyalty, led us from the high court of St. James to an imposed exile in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Which led to my mother's mental illness and my father's increasing alcoholism and despair.

And eventually to my own secrets.

The point was my father was perceived to be disloyal because he violated the cult of secrecy and because, much like the recently fired CIA officer Mary McCarthy or former Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson, he felt Americans needed to know the truth. For real patriots, truth trumps disloyalty to a leadership who uses lies to maintain a cult of secrecy.

But I didn't know any of that then. He was a man and ours was a family that kept secrets.

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Tolstoy (2004) wrote "All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own unique way" (p. 1). Tolstoy was wrong.

Some unhappy families are unhappy in very similar, even predictable ways. My unhappy family story is therefore not unique. For those of us who grew up in families who submitted to a cult of secrecy, the resulting unhappiness is entirely ordinary. Achingly so.

But a cult of secrecy—absolute secrecy—begets more than one family's ordinary unhappiness. It begets *wars*. And wars beget a lot of unhappy families.

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