

LOCAL
AUTHOR'S
DEBUT

A lasting tribute

When Francelle Bradford White's mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, she knew she had to tell her tale of sheer bravery before it was lost forever

Andrée Griotteray was 19-years-old when the Germans invaded and occupied Paris in 1940. Joining her brother's resistance network shortly afterwards, she set to work passing on blank ID cards and printing a secret newspaper under the noses of the Nazis from her post at the Police Headquarters.

Not one to boast about her actions during the war (even though she was awarded the Médaille de la Résistance, the Croix de guerre and the Légion d'honneur), Francelle pieced together details of her mother's courageous exploits and set herself the difficult task of telling her story. *Andrée's War: How One Young Woman Outwitted the Nazis* is drawn from her mother's diaries, extensive research and the memories that have stayed with Francelle since her childhood.

Why did you decide to write the book?

It started when my mother fell prey to Alzheimer's. I decided that in order to cope with my emotions I was going to write about her achievements. Then my uncle died and there was a big funeral for him because he was a leading member of the resistance, and I realised that there was so much about this story that needed to be told to my children. As I started to write the book, I thought that perhaps I could use it as a platform to raise awareness of this dreadful disease.

What was your mother's role and did she ever have second thoughts?

The group she was part of was an intelligence-gathering team that fed information to the French, American and British security services. She always used to say: 'We were young, we didn't think about the danger'. They knew they had to get rid of the Germans; they weren't meant to be there and they had to go.

Why did your uncle Alain found the group?

My grandmother [Andrée's mother] worked for British intelligence in the First World War. One of the army officers, a man called George Piron, asked her to deliver intelligence to England. When the Second

World War broke out, Piron returned to work for English Intelligence and he went to Paris to recruit young members, where he was introduced to Alain.

Is the book based entirely on fact?

It features several extracts from my mother's diaries. There is nothing explicit about her involvement with the resistance because you couldn't write about that for fear of getting caught, but the entries offer an insight into what living in France at that time was like.

I also visited the Ministry of Defence in Paris. After the war, Charles de Gaulle ensured that everyone who had been involved with the resistance registered what they had done at the Ministry. When I started writing there were two members of the original group who were still alive and they were an enormous help.

What advice would you give to people who are thinking of writing a book?

If you want to write about your family history, make the notes now while older generations are still around, otherwise all their stories will never be told. ■

Andrée's War is published on 11 September and will be available locally from Waterstones and Nomad Books. All the net profits from the sale of the book will go to The Andrée Griotteray White Charitable Trust (registered charity No. 1157258), which has been established to fund research into all forms of dementia and to support those suffering from it.



Francelle Bradford White