



Alain and Andrée Griotteray, 1936/37.

ANDRÉE'S WAR

Club member Francelle Bradford White brings to life the remarkable tale of her mother, Andrée Griotteray, and her courageous adventures as a pivotal member of the Parisian French Resistance.

This is a picture (left) of siblings Alain and Andrée Griotteray that was taken in 1937, when they were 15 and 17. They did not know that in just two years' time they would be risking their lives – passing messages, gathering intelligence, distributing illegal newspapers, forging identity cards, carrying cyanide and being arrested by the Gestapo – at the heart of the Resistance movement in occupied Paris.

Fast forward to 2014: Andrée, 94, is suffering from Alzheimer's, and her daughter, Francelle Bradford White, is painstakingly piecing together her mother's remarkable story. The book, *Andrée's War*, is a moving and vivid history brought to life by extracts from Andrée's diaries. 'My mother always described what she did in a lighthearted way,' recalls Francelle. 'But I realised when researching and writing the book that this was obviously not the case.'

From her office in the Parisian Police Headquarters, Andrée was in the thick of it. Alain, one of the youngest ever Resistance leaders, set up the Orion network and recruited his sister to print and distribute an underground newspaper, steal ID cards for fighters escaping France, and travel across the country on intelligence missions. It was a world of messages passed through priests at Confession, of documents stitched into secret suitcase pockets, sleepless nights sheltered in brothels and a cyanide pill always to hand, just in case.

It was only through writing the book that Francelle grasped how fearless her mother had been. 'My mother never talked about the dangers - only the fun they all had. She would often say, "When you are young, you do not think about danger. We would have done anything to get rid of the Germans and anything to help de Gaulle; besides which, we had a lot of fun doing stupid things". She thought of the cyanide as a joke and her only problem with the brothel was being bitten by fleas!'

Andrée often said to Francelle, 'No one at the police headquarters ever imagined I would be doing the sort of things that I did'. Women were powerful in the Resistance movement, precisely because no one expected them to be involved. As couriers they were less likely to be searched and, as we see in her formidable stand-off with a Gestapo interrogator, they could persuade even the toughest of SS men that everything was completely innocent.

Still, it was rare for a woman to be as involved as Andrée was. A friend and fellow Resistance fighter, who Francelle interviewed for the book, said of her that, 'She was always so accommodating, always

happy to do anything we asked. Andrée always accepted that she lived in a man's world and did not do anything to try and change that. She did not want to take any decisions about how the group was run.'

This was partly because Andrée was in thrall of her brother, observes Francelle. 'Andrée and Alain were very close. She worshipped her brother, but I felt he had a chauvinistic attitude towards her.' In her diary, Andrée writes about the pressure she felt with Alain asking her to do more and more. In a speech in Paris in 1996, he referred to the enormous risks he asked his sister to take. 'He did ensure that her work was recognised. She was given the Legion d'Honneur, the Croix de Guerre and Medaille de la Resistance.'

Alain, a national hero who died in 2008, set up *Le Figaro* magazine and co-founded the UDF party. He was also the inspiration for the main character in Graham Greene's book *Our Man in Havana*, after the two met in Vietnam in 1956. 'He was worshipped by everyone for what he had achieved.'

Andrée never boasted about her heroism. 'Despite being a formidable character, she was very unassuming and did not talk much about it. She was, however, very proud that she managed to humiliate the Germans, and often talked about how stupid they were not to realise that she was typing up intelligence under their noses.'

Francelle was inspired to write the book after her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. All profits from direct sales will go to the Andrée Griotteray White Charitable Trust, which funds all forms of dementia research and support. 'She does not know that I have written the book; I can't talk to her about it. But it is good to know her story has not been lost; it lives on in here.'

Francelle will share more of her mother's story at Pall Mall on Wednesday 20 May, 6.30pm–8.00pm.



Andrée aged 26.