

My Spy: Memoir of a CIA Wife

By Bina Cady Kiyonaga. New York: Perennial/HarperCollins, 2000. 308 pages.

Reviewed by Jon A. Wiant

“We lied about our husband’s jobs, stalled inquisitive policemen, befriended minister’s wives, kept our ears open at parties, deflected the children’s questions, and worried in silence alone. We were the CIA wives. You never knew us.” DCI autobiographies occasionally mention a spouse and family, but with the exception of David Phillips’s *Nightwatch: 25 Years of Peculiar Service* and Joe Smith’s *Autobiography of a Cold Warrior*, intelligence officer memoirs rarely touch on the lifestyle of family members living in the center of a secret life and the incalculable costs that they may pay.

Bina Kiyonaga’s loving tribute to her husband, career East Asia and Latin America operations officer Joe Kiyonaga, makes a significant contribution to intelligence literature by sharing with us the awesome demands and extraordinary life of a case officer’s wife living on the front lines of the Cold War. Part spy tale and part love story, *My Spy* chronicles a 30-year marriage that spanned “four continents, three wars, a revolution, five kids, two races, and one faith,” in Kiyonaga’s words.

Joe Kiyonaga, a veteran of the legendary Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team in World War II, joined the CIA in 1949, two years after his marriage to Bina. They spent the early years of their marriage in Asia, where Kiyonaga ran clandestine operations against China and North Korea during the Korean war. It was Bina’s introduction to the secret life and she reflects on the difficulties of holding a relationship together when she was excluded from a significant part of her husband’s life. You sense

the costs of that exclusion as she remembers the night when good friend John Downey went missing, only learning years later that he was in a plane shot down over China where he remained a prisoner for 20 years until his release as part of the US/China rapprochement.

Raising five children in the secret life presented special challenges, not the least of which was the timing of when to tell the children of their father's special life and explain the need to protect his cover. Through it all, and up to Joe's final tour in South America in 1977, where he was medically evacuated and died shortly thereafter of stomach cancer, Bina Kiyonaga performed all of those duties so essential to maintaining Joe's operational effectiveness. She has short shrift for those spouses who failed in this regard. "There were some CIA wives," she recalls, "who talked too much and called the office all of the time. I feared them, too; they were a real danger. They seemed to want to assume some of their husband's importance. Obviously their husbands had confided operational matters to them." The indiscretions of these wives threatened the whole team, in her view.

Though often a stormy marriage by her account, theirs was also a deeply loving and satisfying relationship. She credits her larger CIA family with the richness and support that made her own family life so meaningful.

This is a compelling book, well worthy of a space on your bookshelf. Better yet, put it into the hands of someone steeped in James Bond mythology who has questioned whether intelligence officers have real lives.

Jon A. Wiant is the Department of State Visiting Professor at the Joint Military Intelligence College.

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