

# Infamous novelist spurs journey to past

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Watergate led me to discover my great-grandparents. Forty years ago this summer, the country was riveted by a president who resigned in disgrace, with underlings who played an end-around on the Constitution. One of the ringleaders, the late E. Howard Hunt, was a Hamburg native.

I'd heard Hunt's name over the years, but had forgotten about him until my friend Esther discovered a thriller he published in 1999. Esther works as a librarian and stumbles over all sorts of interesting discards. She handed me the book, knowing I'm a writer with an interest in American history, thinking it was something I'd like.

The novel, "Guilty Knowledge," started strong and had enough twists to keep me turning pages, even if it focused too much on what each character drank and patronized women. A quick Internet search of Hunt brought the man into focus. He was already an established novelist in the 1940s before becoming a CIA spy. Later, he and G. Gordon Liddy ran Richard Nixon's inner circle of "plumbers" and served jail time for their role in Watergate.

Hunt passed away in 2007. I read his biography with interest. What caught my eye, however, was the fact that he is buried in Prospect Lawn Cemetery in Hamburg.

Six months ago, I moved from Orchard Park to Hamburg, so I'm still fuzzy on the town's geography. Where is Prospect Lawn? Mapquest revealed it's off Route 62, near Water Valley, heading toward Eden, two blocks from my house. Then a memory triggered. My father's aunt was buried somewhere in Hamburg in 1981. At age 13, it was the first funeral I attended; I remember standing at her gravesite on a crisp winter afternoon.

I phoned my dad. Yes, he confirmed, Prospect Lawn was indeed where Aunt Freda rested. Having never married, she was interred with her parents, my great-grandparents. The search was on.

On a cool summer day, my stepson, Matty, and I walked up the road for our adventure. We snaked through the cemetery, reading tombstones, seeking long-gone relatives and a spy whose actions stained our country. Matty grew bored after 10 minutes and wandered home, but I remained committed. Access roads divide the lawn into sections. Graves radiate in circles rather than aligned rows. I made quick passes, systematically eliminating one quadrant before moving to the next.

It was tough to search when I didn't know exactly what to look for. Would family names be carved large enough to see?

Rounding the cemetery's edge, I looked into the backyard of a neighboring house. Turning toward the graveyard, at my feet, nestled between two pine trees, was a flat rectangular marker: "E. Howard Hunt Jr.," listing his years of military and CIA service. I literally stumbled upon Hunt, buried in front of his parents.

My breath caught. I've read hundreds of books. To my knowledge, none of the authors was buried two streets away. And certainly none of them brought down a president.

Thirty minutes later, on the cemetery's far side, I discovered a low granite stone etched with my last name. There was my great-grandfather, William; my great-grandmother, Anna; and my grandfather's sister, Freda.

It was a journey into the past – both personal and historical – triggered by a mediocre thriller novel.