

Where loyalty lies

Pam Lecky finds inspiration in her family's wartime experiences

by JUDY GELMAN

Costco's suggested Book Club read provides insight into a selected novel, as well as an appropriate recipe to accompany your own book club's discussion.

Pam Lecky's latest historical novel, *Her Secret War*, explores love and espionage in war-torn Britain. When Sarah Gillespie, a young Irishwoman, loses her family and home during the May 1941 Luftwaffe bombing of Ireland, she seeks refuge with relatives in England. Sarah begins work at Vickers Supermarine, the makers of the iconic Spitfire planes, but when the authorities challenge Sarah to prove her loyalty by undertaking a mission to uncover a spy, she is drawn into the dark world of World War II espionage, where her courage could save lives—possibly at the cost of her own.

Lecky grew up in Clontarf, a few miles from the North Strand area of Dublin where the bombing occurred, and says her family history inspired the novel. "I was intrigued that my mother and aunts left the safety of rural Ireland to work in war-torn Birmingham, England," recalls Lecky. "One aunt was employed in a munitions factory, another was trained as a nurse and my mother was a 'clippie'—a conductress—on the buses."

Although *Her Secret War* isn't their story, fragments of Lecky's relatives' lives are scattered throughout it and its sequel, *Her Last Betrayal*, coming later this year.



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"In Europe wartime food rationing meant that the normal comfort foods, which might have helped ease anxiety, were unavailable," says Lecky. "In Britain, mothers struggled to feed their families, enduring long lines, only to secure meager, often poor-quality, supplies."

In her novel, Sarah's aunt and uncle fare better than city dwellers as they have a garden to grow fruit and vegetables and can barter their produce. "As Sarah's uncle comments, they must fall back on the old ways of doing things," explains Lecky.

For a book club discussion of *Her Secret War*, Lecky suggests setting the mood with 1940s swing music, preferably by Benny Goodman and His Orchestra. And for a dessert true to the period, serve Wacky Cake (see recipe). "My heroine Sarah's downfall is her sweet tooth, so book clubs might serve this typical wartime cake—made without butter, milk or eggs, which were scarce," she explains.

Enjoy the cake with a cocktail that Lecky's heroine Sarah is also rather fond of: a gin and tonic. "To be even more authentic, [drink] a glass of Irish stout, or you can try my favorite cocktail: a French martini," adds Lecky. "Cheers!" ■

Judy Gelman is the creator of the website bookclubcookbook.com.

Pam Lecky's Wacky Cake

1½ cups all-purpose flour
1 cup sugar
¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
½ tsp salt
1 tsp baking soda
½ tsp espresso powder
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 Tbsp cider or white vinegar
⅓ cup vegetable oil
1 cup cold water

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1½ cups semisweet chocolate morsels
½ cup half-and-half

Preheat oven to 350 F. Lightly grease an 8-inch square or 9-inch round pan (at least 2 inches deep).

Whisk dry cake ingredients together in a medium-size bowl. Whisk wet cake ingredients in a separate bowl. Stir wet ingredients into dry ingredients, until thoroughly combined. Pour batter into prepared pan.

Bake cake for 30 to 35 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, or with just a few moist crumbs.

Prepare the icing: Heat the chocolate morsels with half-and-half in a saucepan over low heat, stirring until morsels are melted smooth; pour over cake. Serve plain cake warm from the pan or cool and top with icing.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Recipe adapted from kingarthurbaking.com



COSTCO CONNECTION

Her Secret War (Item 1620362; 1/4) is available in most Costco warehouses.