MEMOIRS

Sins of the fathers

How war trauma is passed down

CAROLINE MOOREHEAD

IN MY GRANDFATHER'S SHADOW
A story of war, trauma and the legacy of silence
ANGELA FINDLAY
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"I TEND TO LOOK upon science", writes Angela Findlay in *In My Grandfather's Shadow*, "as the more serious, thorough, slightly spoilsport older brother of the more instinctive domains of emotion, faith and intuition." Though she comes across as more naturally drawn to the latter, her book is a brave attempt to make sense of the feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy that have plagued her for most of her life. Her quest for understanding takes the reader through myriad experiments, both scientific and behavioural, that, at the end, bring her to some kind of peace.

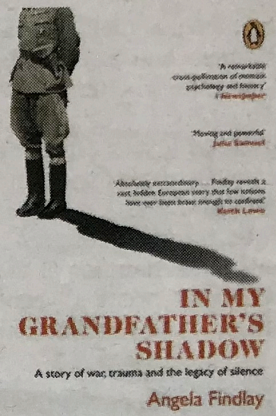
Findlay fills in the background, writing of her dislike of school, which was mitigated by a talent for art: early jobs took her to work with prisoners painting murals. She travelled, roamed, found employment in South America and Australia, but spent much of the time fending off bouts of depression and self-criticism. In Florence her problems were compounded by the terrible distress of being drugged, robbed and sexually assaulted. In Switzerland she was hospitalized for eating disorders.

For a while Findlay identified her German mother as the source of much of her unhappiness. She loved her dearly, but came to believe that her controlling strictness stemmed from traumas left over from her own childhood: she was eleven when the Russians advanced on Berlin in 1945 and, together with a sister, was put on a packed train leaving the city, terrified that she would never see her own mother again.

From "soil ritual" - the exchanging of blends of earth to "stimulate the healing of wounded places" - to the widest assortment of conventional treatments, there was almost no therapy, eastern or western, that Findlay did not try in her quest to feel better. Though she was clearly a good art teacher, she ultimately came to think that absorbing the "messed-up lives and thoughts" of her prisoner students had led her life to "bolt like a runaway horse", "galloping [her] into a string of high-stress and high-risk situations". She wound up in hospital in Germany. "I was", she concluded, "nothing."

Then a new path opened. She read up about recovered memory and the way children born during the Second World War often reproduced irrational, disturbing behaviour, even though they themselves had never experienced the bombings, flight and losses that had affected their parents. This led her to her grandfather. Findlay was born as he was dying of lung cancer, but could he, and his performance as a successful German general, have fed into her fragile mental make-up?

The General had been, according to the archives Findlay unearthed, an impressive athlete and a shrewd and courageous army commander. He served with distinction on the eastern front and in Italy - earning many medals - and survived to become an Allied prisoner of war. The records conveyed only a hint of something less than total commitment to Hitler, but it was enough to deny him the top jobs. But letters between him and Findlay's grandmother also painted a chilling picture of a callous killer, prepared to shoot civilians as he advanced into Russia. Though he was later exonerated by the Allies of the more egregious war crimes, his collaboration with the Nazi war aims was beyond doubt.



Caroline Moorehead is the author of a quartet of books on resistance in the Second World War

Much of Findlay's book revolves around the question of postwar German guilt and punishment, the need for confession and apology, and the role for reconciliation. She writes about new work in genetics and the neurosciences, and the "transgenerational trauma" widely accepted to be handed down from parents to children. Throughout the book she worries away at the nature of evil. Often her musings take the form of questions. How far was the Wehrmacht involved in the massacres of Jews and civilians? Was her own grandfather a criminal, and had she inherited his guilt?

Many historians and writers - notably Christopher Browning, Daniel Goldhagen, Philippe Sands and Bernhard Schlink - have grappled with allegiance, memory, collective guilt and accountability, and the debates rumble on. Angela Findlay concludes her often painful journey deriving comfort from the fact that she is not alone in her unease and unhappiness, and that others like her have struggled with, and been made ill by, the actions and experiences of their forebears. She cannot absolve her grandfather, but there are, she has come to believe, many shades of evil and many ways to express guilt. *In My Grandfather's Shadow* is a large, baggy, often undigested book - and it lacks an index - but it is full of insights and interesting research. The best of it is the story of her German grandfather and his family, and the aftermath not only of their particular war, but of the war throughout Germany itself, a country in which sixty-one cities had been destroyed and a quarter of its population made homeless. To have made more of that might have made a better book. ■