

Teen spy author spills secrets at library

BY CRAIG PURCELL

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People found out just enough about *The Boy Who Knew Too Much* when author Jeffrey Westhoff talked about his new book Aug. 27 at the James Kennedy Public Library.

Westhoff's parents, Tom and Peggy (Showalter) Westhoff, are former residents of Dyersville. The author read portions of his recently published teen spy novel and shared anecdotes about the writing process with a group of 23, many of whom are cousins still living in the area.

Amazon.com describes the book as an "action-charged (young adult) adventure that blends the suspense of Alfred Hitchcock with the thrills of

James Bond."

Westhoff is a self-professed Bond-o-phile who uses James Bond references throughout the story. He said the book's protagonist—American teen Brian Parker—was an easy character to write because Parker is 90 percent based on Westhoff.

On a school trip to Europe, Brian comes across a spy who reveals secrets to Brian with his dying words. Brian is then chased across Europe by spies and other nefarious characters who want what Brian knows.

The idea of writing the book came to Westhoff in a serendipitous moment.

"I used to be a feature writer for a newspaper, and I was working on a story about young adult spy novels," Westhoff said. "A friend of mine who's an author



Craig Purcell • Staff Photo

Author Jeffrey Westhoff, son of former Dyersville residents Tom and Peggy (Showalter) Westhoff, left, signs a copy of his teen spy/adventure novel "The Boy Who Knew Too Much" for Molly Evers at the James Kennedy Public Library Aug. 27.

was having a book signing at a local bookstore, and I was looking for sources. I asked her if she knew any-

one who was writing a teenage spy novel."

The author didn't hear him correctly and thought

he had said he was writing a teenage spy novel. After Westhoff told her he wasn't, the author told him he should.

"I'd been reading them for the story and thought in the back of my head I could probably write one," said Westhoff. "So it was almost an accident that spurred me to write it."

He shared how he figured out how to write the character of Larissa, an ally Brian picks up while in France. Admitting he had no idea of what it was like to be a 16-year-old French girl, Westhoff said he prepared a "carefully worded" message on MySpace that he sent to girls who lived in the particular area of France he was writing about, asking them what their lives were like.

Chuckling at the idea,

Westhoff said the very first girl who responded was extremely helpful, and is thanked in the book.

The eight-year writing process included periods when Westhoff did not work on it, but his efforts reached fruition when Intrigue Publishing picked up the book.

Molly Evers, a cousin from Dyersville, had Westhoff sign her copy of the book. "It's very action-packed, and I could follow it because I (had visited) some of those areas," she said. "The main character was always one step ahead of the spies."

Readers may need to wait a while to find out if he stays that way. Westhoff has found that his readers want more. "It seems like everyone who's read it is asking about a sequel," he said.

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