



## Living with lies

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**Title:** The Wolf and the Watchman... a CIA childhood

**Author:** Scott Johnson

I was attracted to this memoir by the lure of a fictional read.

After his parent's divorce when he is six years old, Johnson, an only child, lives with his father and new stepmother, and becomes conscious of something unexplained and mysterious about their lives. His father reveals his secret real career as a CIA operative when his son is fourteen years old.

From then on the boy struggles to come to terms with a life that entails keeping his father's cover by telling lies, which impacts his own ability to trust anyone, particularly his adored father who is a complex man. The family moves around a great deal, the boy reminded of his predicament every time he has to answer simple

questions like, "Where do you come from? What does your father do?"

Feeling that his father's career has contaminated his ability to live his own life, Johnson becomes a war correspondent for Newsweek, searching for the "truth" of a situation.

He is particularly attracted to dangerous war zones like Sarajevo and Iraq, where the experiences were... "all mine, and no one, not even him, could take it away from me. Maybe this was why young men went to war — to claim their own hold on life, on death; to wean themselves from their fathers; to kill or be killed on their own terms."

Johnson explores the father-son relationship with insight, grasping all the time for ways to reconcile having unwillingly lived a double life.

That this book was written at all is a tribute to Johnson's ability to work through his

family dynamic and reach a point where he can live his life openly, having persuaded his retired father to be as open about his past as permissible. He gains some idea of what his father did as a CIA Case Officer, trying to recruit selected individuals to spy for the US.

Johnson learns for himself of CIA activities in Iraq and Afghanistan, and provides, through his own research and interviews, a clear if simplified account of the dynamics of how the war in Iraq became such an unsolvable mess.

Set against an international backdrop, this is above all an honest and personal account of Johnson striving to find his own identity through exploring his intimate relationship with his much-loved father, and the impact that secrecy had on all their lives.

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