

Press Release

Penn Stewart's Debut Novel *Fertile Ground* is a "Riveting Mystery" set during WW II

Knox Robinson Publishing author, Penn Stewart, spent over six years researching and composing his debut novel, *Fertile Ground*. Stewart holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Memphis and a doctorate in English from the University of Nebraska. His research for the novel included an in-depth investigation of closed congressional hearings held in 1938; J. Edgar Hoover made the case for a threat assessment of east coast German social clubs known as *bunds* and was granted authorization to conduct covert surveillance. Eventually, the FBI infiltrated a number of these clubs that promoted the United States' isolationistic stance on the war in Europe. Stewart conducted extensive research and traveled to several locations to examine archived material detailing the arrest, transportation, and internment of German nationals and American citizens of German descent in the early stages of the war. Prisoners were held in numerous camps located across the United States, including Fort Lincoln, which is located just south of Bismarck, North Dakota and is where a portion of the novel takes place.

When asked about the impetus for the novel, Stewart stated, "There were a couple of things that generated the idea. Shortly after 9/11, I remember reading a story about a Sikh who was killed because he was assumed to be a Muslim. I found this misidentification to be tragic and the action of the perpetrators to be indefensible. It also made me think about how we look at one another and the assumptions we make based on people's ethnicity and heritage.

"My grandfather was a German immigrant who came to the United States in the early 1930s. His son, my father, was in elementary school during World War II and I wondered what type of effect the propaganda in the media may have had on him at the time. In the course of my research I discovered the government was not only interning Japanese on the west coast, but to a much lesser extent, they also interned Germans and Italians on the east coast. It was at that moment I knew I had a story worthy of a novel."

But the novel is more than a depiction of security measures enacted by the government. Stewart draws upon his family's experiences from the time period thanks to an autobiography his paternal grandmother wrote that provided family trees, pivotal events in their lives, and details of the family's life on a farm in upstate New York. "My grandmother's book opened up a new perspective for the novel. I even named my protagonist Lucy, my grandmother's name, to honor her contribution to the story. Her account provided a genuine glimpse into her domestic life that provided an interesting counterbalance to the story of an immigrant being whisked off by the FBI in the middle of the night." Indeed, much of the novel centers on Lucy's efforts to maintain the household, raise two boys—who are dealing with their own issues—and secure the release of her husband, all as doubts about his innocence begin to grow.

"Whenever you want to find out what a character is made of, you have to put them under pressure," Stewart said. *Fertile Ground* certainly puts its characters under a considerable amount

of pressure as social, economic, and familial relations are all strained at a time when these relations are most needed to survive. It is a compelling novel that examines the limitations of loyalty and the quality of character that is only revealed through adversity. Acclaimed novelist Jonis Agee describes *Fertile Ground* as a "riveting mystery novel" that is a "thoughtful and perceptive exploration of loyalty and betrayal."

Fertile Ground will be released in hardback and all major electronic formats in October 2014 and will be distributed throughout North America, United Kingdom, and Europe by Midpoint Book Sales & Distribution.