

Speaker James Olson says no one knew truth about him and spouse.

Imagine living a lie for 31 years.

That's what James Olson and his wife Meredith did while spying for the CIA.

Olson, a former chief of CIA counterintelligence, was the featured speaker at an annual meeting of All Points Cooperative Jan. 8 at Monsanto's Water Utilization and Learning Center.

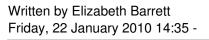
"We couldn't say where we were or what we were doing," he said. "Our parents and friends didn't even know we were CIA officers."

The United States needs spies, he said, to protect the country and its vital interests.

Spying for his country was the furthest thing from his mind when Olson, a farm boy from lowa, received a mysterious phone call.

At the time, he was in his last year of law school, studying to take the lowa bar exam and job hunting.

The voice said, "'We think we have a career opportunity for you,' "Olson said and told him if he was interested, he was to meet two men at a Des Moines hotel.



As a member of the Naval Reserves, Olson said he thought it was someone from the Navy who had called.

When he showed up at the hotel and discovered the men were from the CIA, Olson said he almost fell on the floor.

If interested, Olson was invited to Washington D.C. under the guise of interviewing for a lawyer job with the U.S. Department of Commerce.

They also needed his word of honor that he wouldn't reveal details of the visit to anyone.

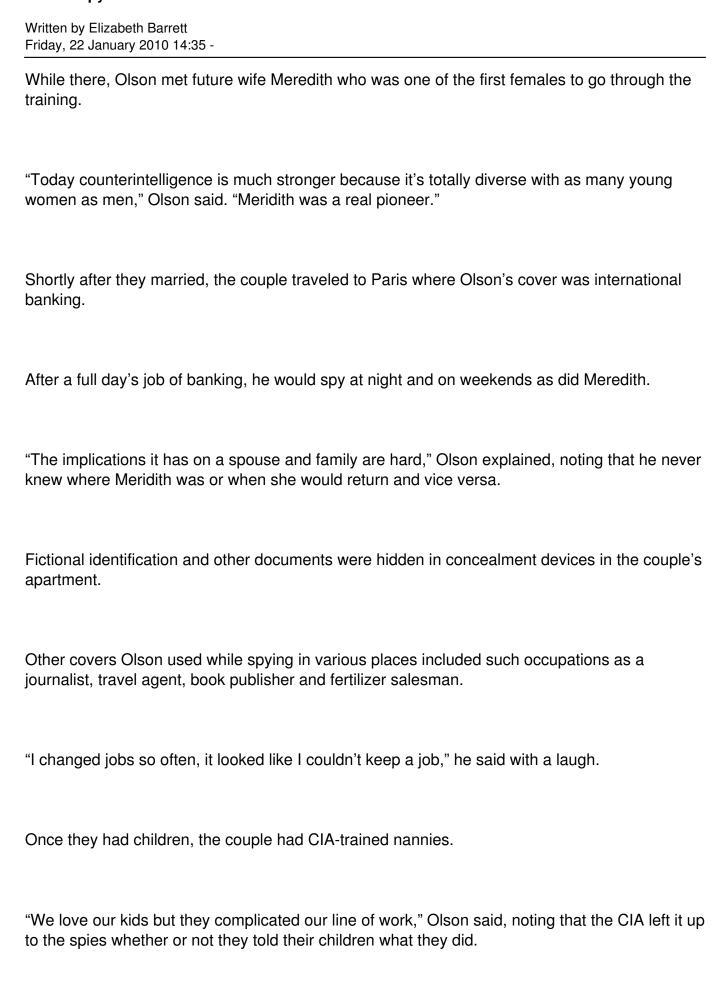
Once he arrived in D.C., Olson was whisked to a safe house where he underwent aptitude and polygraph tests and psychological screening among other tests.

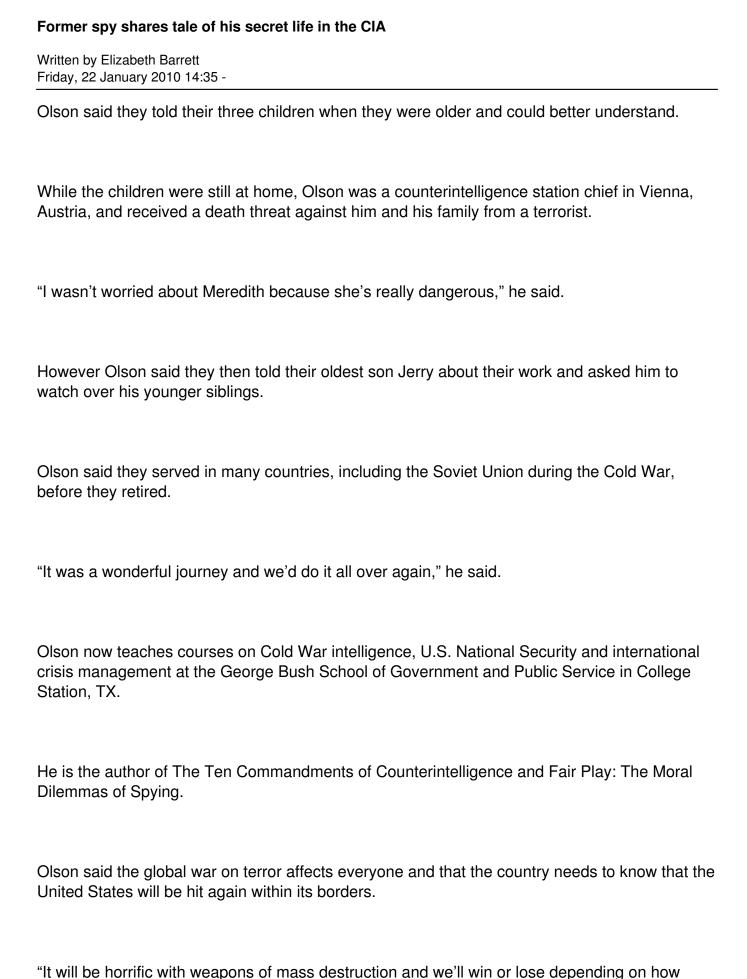
Finally he was offered a position in clandestine service and accepted it.

After finishing law school and passing the bar exam, Olson traveled to a location in Virginia called "The Farm" where he had two years of training—much of it paramilitary—that included such things as how to jump out of airplanes, work with advanced weapons, a different kind of hand-to-hand combat and intensive education in four foreign languages.

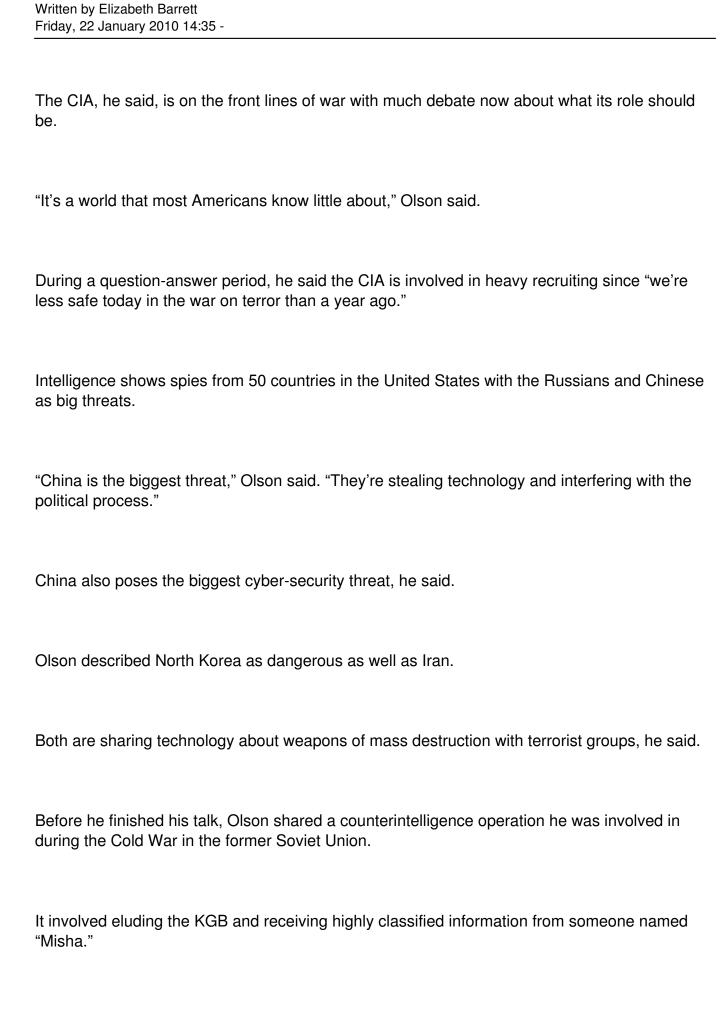
Tools of the trade included how to write secretly, tap phones, bug rooms, open letters, pick locks and more.

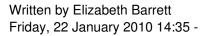
"If you read spy novels, it's part of the everyday skill set," he said.





good our intelligence is," he said.





"Misha" turned out to be KGB agent who hated Communism and wanted the CIA to get him, his wife and family out of the Soviet Union.

"He turned out to be probably the best source we ever had and we got his family out," Olson said.

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