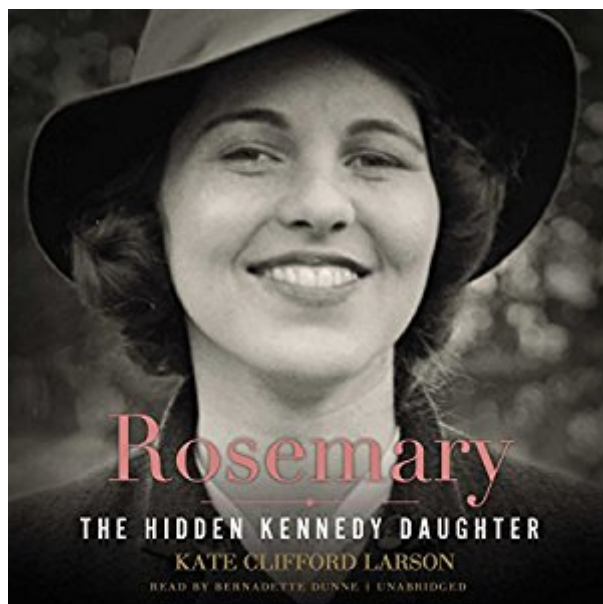


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Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter



Synopsis

They were the most prominent American family of the 20th century. The daughter they secreted away made all the difference. Joe and Rose Kennedy's strikingly beautiful daughter, Rosemary, attended exclusive schools, was presented as a debutante to the queen of England, and traveled the world with her high-spirited sisters. And yet Rosemary was intellectually disabled - a secret fiercely guarded by her powerful and glamorous family. Major new sources - Rose Kennedy's diaries and correspondence, school and doctors' letters, and exclusive family interviews - bring Rosemary to life as a girl adored but left far behind by her competitive siblings. Kate Larson reveals both the sensitive care Rose and Joe gave to Rosemary and then, as the family's standing reached an apex, the often desperate and duplicitous arrangements the Kennedys made to keep her away from home as she became increasingly intractable in her early 20s. Finally, Larson illuminates Joe's decision to have Rosemary lobotomized at age 23 and the family's complicity in keeping the secret. Rosemary delivers a profoundly moving coda: JFK visited Rosemary for the first time while campaigning in the Midwest; she had been living isolated in a Wisconsin institution for nearly 20 years. Only then did the siblings understand what had happened to Rosemary and bring her home for loving family visits. It was a reckoning that inspired them to direct attention to the plight of the disabled, transforming the lives of millions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rosemary's story is truly heartbreaking; at many turns her sad fate could have been prevented, but

because of the way things were at the time the people in her life didn't know any better. The circumstances of her birth shocked me; I had never ever heard of that practice before and I actually had to put the book down and digest that for a few hours before I picked it up again. Once I got past that initial shock, I could not put the book down. It is so well researched and well written. Not only does it tell Rosemary's story, but has so much information about the early 1900's that I found absolutely fascinating; special education of the time, women's role in society, politics, psychology of the time...the author was so knowledgeable and writes so well that it draws you in and reads like fast paced fiction. She uses personal letters and diaries from Kennedy family members and friends to really give the reader an insight into why things happened the way that they did. It really makes you think about decisions, who in our lives we let influence our decisions, and how those decisions affect our children and our children's children. I absolutely loved this book and will certainly be looking for other things by this author.

I just finished reading this biography of Rosemary Kennedy. I thoroughly enjoyed it. It is incredibly well researched and well written, the writing is distinctly personal with a familiar ease. Larson writes with a kindness towards the memory of Rosemary that becomes increasingly sensitive and caring as the book progresses. She brings you into the life of Rosemary by way of the lives of her more well known family members and the events they shared. The story of their lives is intensely detailed and always placed in the context of American and, sometimes, world culture and politics as the time. This gives scope to the private struggles of Rosemary and her family. After hearing about the book I'm glad I didn't jump the gun and read up on Rosemary. Seeing her life story unfold in the pages of this beautiful biography was my patience rewarded. The first few chapters are as much history as biography. Larson delves into the lives of Rose (Rosemary's mother) and Joe (her father) beginning with their childhoods with particular emphasis on family politics and connections. She then lets the story of Rosemary's, and her siblings, early life unfold before getting into the many schools, teachers, and therapies utilized in an effort to cure Rosemary. Interspersed with the difficulties faced by Rosemary and those who cared for her are her public appearances and social outings. While these were carefully planned to hide her limitations they are a delight to read and often brought a smile to my face thinking of the joy Rosemary took in her inclusion with her family at both minor as well as important functions. While the book is about Rosemary the woman it's equally about her impact on the Kennedy family, the ways it brought them together and how the difficulties faced altered their dynamic. Much of the facts and detailed were extrapolated from personal letters, particularly during the middle chapters of the book where Rosemary herself was able to write to her

parents and siblings. The letters to and from her caregivers and teachers as well as between other members of the family complete the record with few gaps. Conjecture is utilized when the evidence doesn't quite spell out what happened but plausible scenarios are obvious. There is a photo insert that includes the Kennedy family but focuses on Rosemary herself. I took these pages one at a time so as to not spoil what I had not yet read for myself. I liked this. I looked at the pictures at the conclusion of each chapter and stopped when I came to one of an event or time in her life that I had not yet read about. These photographs add so much. Much is included on the state of mental healthcare from the 1920's to 1990's and beyond. From the start the Kennedys were essentially on their own to orchestrate her care. This brought about many changes in the care and treatment of persons with intellectual disabilities, which were championed by the Kennedy family and legislated into action during the short years of the Kennedy administration. The book details the ongoing awareness and philanthropic efforts of the Kennedy family and the impact they have had and continue to have on the lives of hundreds of thousands of special needs Americans and their families. This is Rosemary's legacy, began and developed by those who loved her. I'm deeply saddened over what happened to Rosemary. Her story will stay with me forever. I'm even more saddened for the disabled without families who have the means to cover the cost of personalized round the clock care, a situation that greatly benefited Rosemary and helped her live a life with more kindness and experiences than most others with difficulties. With grief for Rosemary's ordeal and the difficult lives of countless others like her I also have hope for the ever evolving medical research and programs to help special needs children and adults as well as gratitude for my own family, our struggles small in comparison. Rosemary is a beautiful account of a life that impacted so many others. Well written and thorough while maintaining a concise writing style this biography is a new benchmark for writing on the Kennedy family and on the history of the education, treatment, and medical care available for those with serious disabilities. It further brings to light the struggles faced by the families of children. This is a biography with wide appeal. Those who enjoy 20th century history, political history of the United States, those who have family members with special needs, those who work with or are interested in past treatment of those with special needs, and anyone who would like to learn more about the Kennedy family would like this book. It's a book which is personal and emotional yet full of factual detail on the lives of Rosemary, the Kennedy family, and the efforts of the family to create a legacy of an ever improving standard of living for people like Rosemary.

Larson has synthesized a tremendous amount of research into a compelling narrative of Rosemary,

the Kennedy daughter who was hidden away by the family as a result of her mental deficiencies. The Kennedy's were clearly a product of their times. Reading this fascinating book, it's difficult to indict them for what we now know were tragic mistakes. From Rosemary's horrifying birth (I had no idea that what happened when she was born was commonplace at the time!) to her later unfortunate lobotomy, medical personnel honestly thought they were doing the best they could by her. Author Kate Larson writes Rosemary's story very well....I enjoy biographies that, while well-researched, don't bog the reader down with minute details or try to slant the information presented. She tells a story here providing the facts, not editorial, allowing the reader to come to their own conclusions about the decisions made. The book includes photographs as well and is a quick read at 320 pages. I probably read it even faster than I normally would because the narrative was so well done and interesting. If you have any interest in the Kennedy family, who was probably as close to American "royalty" as one can get, I'd highly recommend picking this one up. I think it's especially relevant today given that we are becoming more and more aware of our societal failings with mental health.

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