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Biography

Reagan's Roots: The People and Places That Shaped His Character
Peter Hannaford
Images from the Past Publishers
978-1-884592-57-7
(November 30, 2011)

Ronald Reagan is most often connected to Hollywood glamour and Washington politics. The fact that Reagan spent his formative years in the American heartland, living in a string of small towns in Illinois, has been almost entirely overlooked until now.

In contrast to the glamorous film star and elderly Republican, the enthusiastic, eager-to-please young boy portrayed in Peter Hannaford's *Reagan's Roots* comes as a breath of fresh air, adding a new, much-needed dimension to the Gipper's persona.

As a former Reagan advisor and the author of several books on the former President's legacy, Hannaford is well positioned to provide insight into this oft-overlooked time in Reagan's life and he does so with great efficiency. This is a short book and the narrative moves very quickly, but in doing so it captures the peripatetic nature of Ronald's youth, as the Reagans shuttled between a series of tiny towns in Illinois.

Reagan's Roots establishes the family dynamic that shaped young Reagan—Ronald's alcoholic father, God-fearing mother, and older brother—and introduces the teachers, clergy, and role models who molded his values and thinking as he grew into an adult. Focusing on the development of the future President's character rather than his politics, Hannaford illuminates the circumstances that brought to the fore Reagan's Midwestern penchant for self-reliance, modesty, self-effacing humor, and Christian reverence.

He also establishes that Ronald Reagan was one hard-working kid. As a teenager, he was employed doing odd jobs in construction, as a caddy at a golf club and, briefly, as a roustabout for the Ringling Brothers Circus. During a stint as a lifeguard, he saved seventy-seven lives.

As Hannaford notes, many of the interests Ronald Reagan would pursue as an adult had already taken root by high school: "In addition to his drive and determination to do well in football, basketball, and swimming, his youthful experiences participating in some of [his mother's] biblically related dramatic presentations had sparked his interest in the [high] school's

drama club.”

Reagan’s Roots provides a brisk survey of the early life of Ronald Reagan that is ideal for casual readers looking for a quick introduction to the former President or long-time fans curious about his life in the Midwest.

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