

With Love, Aunt Eleanor: Stories From My Life with the First Lady of the World

Eleanor Roosevelt II

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“Getting a pizza delivered is particularly challenging,” writes the author. “When I tell them my name there is always a pause, a moment of disbelief.” Her aunt was Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Roosevelt; her father was Eleanor’s brother, Hall.

Aunt Eleanor was a constant presence in the author’s life for forty-two years, and despite her fame and accomplishments, “she always spoke to me as an equal,” writes her niece. After Uncle Franklin’s death in 1945, Roosevelt visited her aunt for five weeks every year in New York City for a week in the winter and at her Val-Kill Cottage in Hyde Park, New York for a month each summer.

Roosevelt, now eighty-five, describes her debutante ball at the White House with Aunt Eleanor at her side, how the First Lady would nod off during services at the St. James Episcopal Church in Hyde Park (embarrassing her niece), and how they would slurp ice cream sodas in a drugstore after seeing a Broadway play. She recounts the times they walked through the woods before breakfast to pick wildflowers, purchased fruit and vegetables at outdoor markets, and went on picnics.

Roosevelt writes that her aunt would stay up late at night in her New York apartment, writing letters to family and intimate friends. It would take the recipients some time to decipher them because “my aunt’s handwriting was dreadful.” There are photographs of several of the letters—as well as grocery lists—and the scrawl is indeed difficult to read.

The book looks at an era from an intimate perspective: the end of the Great Depression, the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan, the founding of the United Nations and its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the movements for women’s rights and Southern blacks’ civil rights. Roosevelt details her aunt’s dedication to these causes.

The author was married twice and had four children. This is her only book. After her aunt’s death in 1962, she began what would become a lifelong commitment to bringing the “personal side of her aunt to the world.” The book’s illustrations include photographs of Aunt Eleanor with the author and other family members as well as with some of the world’s most famous leaders.

Although the writing tends to be a bit sentimental at times, *With Love* provides a rare view of the private life of a public woman. Readers interested in politics and history, or anyone who remembers a loving aunt, will enjoy this ardent portrait of Eleanor Roosevelt.

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