



The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt

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A candid and insightful look at an era and a life through the eyes of one of the most remarkable Americans of the twentieth century, First Lady and humanitarian Eleanor Roosevelt.

The daughter of one of New York's most influential families, niece of Theodore Roosevelt, and wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt witnessed some of the most remarkable decades in modern history, as America transitioned from the Gilded Age, the Progressive Era, and the Depression to World War II and the Cold War.

A champion of the downtrodden, Eleanor drew on her experience and used her role as First Lady to help those in need. Intimately involved in her husband's political life, from the governorship of New York to the White House, Eleanor would eventually become a powerful force of her own, heading women's organizations and youth movements, and battling for consumer rights, civil rights, and improved housing. In the years after FDR's death, this inspiring, controversial, and outspoken leader would become a U.N. Delegate, chairman of the Commission on Human Rights, a newspaper columnist, Democratic party activist, world-traveler, and diplomat devoted to the ideas of liberty and human rights.

This single volume biography brings her into focus through her own words, illuminating the vanished world she grew up, her life with her political husband, and the post-war years when she worked to broaden cooperation and understanding at home and abroad.

The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt includes 16 pages of black-and-white photos.

The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt Details

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Nikki says

Having watched Ken Burns series about the Roosevelts I was interested in learning more about Eleanor Roosevelt. I hoped to get an understanding about their very unconventional relationship of living almost separate lives but being devoted to one another, while cementing their place in history during his political career. I can't say that I have any better understanding of her devotion to Franklin to the extent that she appeared to form fond relationships with one or two of the other women in Franklin's life. But, reading Eleanor's words describing how she fit into the world she was born into, especially her life as a child, helped me understand her loyalty to those she cared for and her desire to be an agent for change for women in her time.

The writing isn't compelling, but put into context I believe that this book deserves 4 stars. It delivers on giving the reader an understanding of what Eleanor overcame living in a world in which she was the first to say that her looks and artistic and athletic abilities were lacking to the standards of the day.

Lene Jaqua says

Eleanor's story is well written, but written at a distance. She is a woman of strong convictions, first puritan-like, later more liberal but the same rigid exterior. What I struggled with in this biography is I felt we never got to HER. She was always supportive of Franklin (nice wife) and it was all about his causes.

A particular thing that stood out to me was the birth of her first daughter and her first son. Daughter came first. She wrote something akin to, I gave birth to a daughter and we named her Anna. Nothing more. Then for the son. I gave birth to a son and I was so happy because Franklin and his mother really wanted a son. Nothing more.

I know she loved her children and took good care of them. I just wish some of that would have been in the biography to make it come alive a little. Her courtship with Franklin had not one spark of passion in her writing of it. No excitement, no anticipation, no bliss. It is as if this woman hides her heart.

Mostly what this book brought to me, especially towards the middle and the end, was that it served as an apology for all the things that Eleanor and Franklin had done that the media had tried to lynch them for (as all media does -- deserved or undeserved). There were many such defensive moments here and there. The most interesting part of the book was towards the end after Franklin died where we learn of all the things Eleanor does after his death.

Greg says

"This is intolerable. We cannot permit it to go on. Our political conventions, as they now function, are as obsolete as outmoded machinery," writes Eleanor Roosevelt in the early 1960s. Sound familiar? If you want to read a story about one of the hardest working women in American political history, this one's for you!

Helen Louise says

Remarkable woman, way ahead of her time. I so admire how she accomplished so much and made her own way at that very tough time in history. She served as a delegate for the first session of the U.N. in 1946! Traveled extensively throughout the world for different causes, all to try and make the world a better place for the unfortunate.

Gina says

This is a very careful, guarded autobiography, written towards the end of Eleanor's life. And it was an extraordinary life, indeed. It is a challenge for anyone to write a candid autobiography, of course; there are people in everyone's life who deserve privacy and forgiveness and respect despite their failings. But it makes for a sterile book. There is nothing salacious here; no insight at all in to the experience of being married to a serial womanizer, for example, or even acknowledgement that she was in fact married to one. The years after his polio are treated as a mild rough patch and largely glossed over. This makes the parts about her married life pretty tedious, and little more than an accounting of who came to dinner at the White House when, with a big chunk detailing her visit with the Queen of England. Even her political activities during this time are fairly opaque, and she often refers to incidents with the assumption that everyone will know what she is talking about, which might have been more true at the books publication fifty years ago. It is clear, however, that FDR was an absolute genius in so many ways, with insatiable curiosity, a prodigious memory, a gift for listening to various points of view, and an unsurpassed sense for political power. Eleanor was obviously gifted in her own right, but there is no question she gained much through the opportunity to closely observe and be tutored by him.

The most interesting parts of the book to me were towards the end when she recounts her visits to the Soviet Union and shares her thoughts about the threats communism posed. It is fascinating to read someone's impressions, the visceral fear, at a point in time from the near-ish future, when you know at least how part of the story plays out. She explains that the people in communist countries are then not free, but they are fed, and that forty years previous they were not free but unfed. She implores the western world to not underestimate the power of the freedom to eat. It is also a bit sad to see her genuine hope in the UN to make things better, which seems to not have really worked out either, at least to the degree she imagined.

Andrea says

I got into reading about past Presidents around the time of the inauguration and became very curious about Eleanor Roosevelt when reading about her husband. After reading this three-volume autobiography, I am no longer curious, but I have even more admiration.

If you're very curious about her childhood, then by all means read the first volume, but if not, read the wikipedia article for a summary and skip to the good stuff. The second volume covers her years in the White House and contains many observations about the world and the US at the time. She definitely transforms from a woman unsure of herself at the beginning of her family life to an insightful commentator on world events. Roosevelt spends more time in the third volume detailing her own worldview as a member of the UN

delegation and Civil Rights committee. The topics on which she spends the most time are colored heavily by the mounting Communist threat at the time she wrote that volume (around 1961), but her convictions that all people deserve basic human rights and that we all have a responsibility to bring about a world in which possession of these rights are the bare minimum to be expected are still as prescient and important today as ever. I enjoyed getting to know Eleanor thoroughly.

Fadzai says

Enjoyable read, and it was fascinating to observe how she responded to and was influenced by circumstances at different stages of her life. Given how widely quoted she is and the esteem she seems to be held in, I had assumed before reading this book that she had led a charmed life sheltered from the trials and tribulations faced by us mere mortals. Finding out that this was not the case was a pleasant surprise which made her all the more human and easy to relate to.

There were some things I would have liked her to talk more about, and I found myself googling certain events or people that she mentions only in passing (or not at all, but I had read elsewhere) to fill in the blanks. On the one hand, I can respect that when writing one's autobiography it is up to the author to decide what they feel comfortable disclosing for their own and other people's sake. On the other hand, I cannot help but think that it is somewhat underhanded to omit certain facts which leave holes in the narrative and short change readers - surely if you have committed to writing an autobiography, some element of bravery is required? I am still ambivalent on this point though....ultimately you have a right to tell your story as you see fit I suppose!

Chrissie says

This book is a collection of several volumes originally sold separately. Portions of these have been abridged and additional information has been added. All alterations were done by the author herself, in an effort to improve the content. Thus the book is split up into different sections, each having a specific theme. I liked some sections and disliked others.

The first part is about her childhood and familial relationships. This part was excellent. You see how Eleanor develops from an insecure and naive girl into a strong, independent woman. Watching this transformation is inspiring. You come to understand how and why she changes. You understand how she came to marry Franklin. You also understand the family she married into. This shaped her too.

Then you follow her years with Franklin. He establishes his career, becomes president and dies. How they influenced each other is covered, but historical events are skimmed over. This is not the book to pick if you want the details of Franklin's political decisions or the war years. There are huge gaps in both historical events and personal relationships. This is an autobiography and clearly Eleanor is telling us what SHE wants said. There is no mention of either her own or her husband's extramarital relationships. It is not just the relationships that are lacking but also Eleanor's support of Blacks and Jews is scarcely dealt with. I was disappointed that so very much was missing. I wanted to hear more about her efforts to coerce her husband into helping these groups. Oh, and it was strange how she spoke of her husband not as Franklin, but as "my husband"!

After the death of Franklin her role as a UN Delegate and Chairman of the Commission of Human Rights is meticulously covered, but here the writing sounded like a political speeches selling her views against the prevalent beliefs during the Cold War period. This section felt dated and extremely repetitive! I would mutter, "OK, here we go again.....another speech with the same message for the fifth, sixth time!" "Old truths" are proclaimed. This was the part of the book that was most thoroughly covered. She traveled all over the world speaking to political leaders. Much of this section reads as a travelogue recounting all the different places she visited. She worked as a columnist, a speaker and a radio correspondent. She never stopped working; the book follows her through her 75th year, as an activist and speaker of human rights. Her death, three years later, is not covered.

The audiobook is narrated by Tavia Gilbert. This narrator has a young voice, and it worked well for the young, naive Eleanor. As her self-assurance grows it felt more and more misplaced.

Marilyn says

Interesting read. Autobiography's always have a different flavour than historical fiction or biography's, eg books by Doris Kearns Goodwin. One of the most interesting comments she makes is right in the preface "The reason that fiction is more interesting than any other form of literature to those of us who like to study people is that in fiction, the author can really tell the truth without hurting anyone and without humiliating him/or herself too much.....In an autobiography this is hard to do, try as you will. The more honest you are about yourself and others, however, the more valuable what you have written will be in the future as a picture of the people and their problems during the period covered in the autobiography." She goes on to say "I learned something which has stood me in a good stead many times- the most important thing in any relationship is not what you get but what you give."

She certainly gave a life of service, her travels and all those she met along her way made these words come to life for me.

Aida says

This book has excerpts and a synopsis from Ms. Roosevelt's earlier work; This is My Story, and continues where said book left off; through Mr. Roosevelt's presidency, their years in the White House, her role as his eyes and ears when he couldn't travel due to illness, her leadership in the development of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Bill, up through her personal and political life in the early 1960's. While one gains insight into the development of Ms. Roosevelt's beliefs and persona in the first half of the book, the reader gains much more knowledge into her ideas towards politics, foreign affairs, human rights and the activist she later becomes. She was a true leader and developer of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, creating change locally in the USA, as well as world wide. She became a skilled negotiator and mediator and activist for women rights and civil rights. I found the second half of the book much more fascinating, particularly when she is on her own, after the death of her husband. She kept herself close to her convictions and didn't hide away in her cottage. Rather she effected true change for the benefit of all by being involved in the UN and her political groups. The reading is a bit slow for the most part, not a real page-turner. Nonetheless, she was quite a remarkable woman and led quite a remarkable life!

Sushila says

I had actually known very little about Eleanor Roosevelt before reading this book. It was wonderful to both learn about her and view the world through her eyes. She lived to be almost eighty and her life was never dull. One can only aspire to be a fraction as active as she. A biography of Eleanor Roosevelt is fascinating because you really get sense of how she developed as a person. It was a slow process for her and she didn't become the independent person we think of until well into her middle age. I particularly enjoyed the later part of the book where I learned about her work with the UN and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She also shares more of her personal thoughts and ideas at the end. (These comments were sadly missing from earlier parts of the book that covered the Depression, WWII and FDR's presidency.) I also liked her accounts of visiting many newly independent nations in Africa and Asia. Many of Eleanor's thoughts about world affairs are still applicable today (despite being post-Cold-War). I was impressed with how humble yet fearless Eleanor Roosevelt was. She was a true inspiration.

By the way, I would give 4.5 stars out of 5 and have decided to round up. There were a few times I wished that ER had revealed her inner monologue more and not been quite so diplomatic but you can understand why she did/did not write what she did.

Jean says

This book was originally published in 1946. I first read it in 1960 just after I attended a lecture by Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962). Over the years I have read everything I could get my hands on about Eleanor. I was reviewing some notes the other day and decided it was about time I reread "Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt" by Eleanor Roosevelt.

The book is well written but it must be taken in the age it was written, by a woman of the 19th century. The book is written in the reserve style of that era. Eleanor reviews her early life in the large Roosevelt family. She goes into details about her life as first lady and at the end of her life her hopes for the United Nations. (Last section was added to new edition issued just before her death) I could see how Eleanor rose to the challenge of first lady and the need for her to be the eyes and ears for her invalid husband, the president. Many former first ladies were overwhelmed with the role but it brought out the best in Eleanor. Mrs. Roosevelt was a complex woman and to begin to understand her it is necessary to read a wide range books about her from all points of view. For anyone wanting to learn about Eleanor Roosevelt or about first ladies, this is a must-read book.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book is eighteen and a half hours. Tavia Gilbert does an excellent job narrating the book. Gilbert is an actress, voice-over artist and audiobook narrator. Gilbert won the Audie Award for the Best Female Narrator for 2017.

Rachielle says

Eleanor lived through very interesting phases of the country's history - World War I, World War II, the

suffrage movement, and the Cold War to name a few. She played a significant part of her husband's presidency, being FDR's eyes, ears and legs, so to speak.

I read this book because it was used heavily as a source in Noelle Hancock's "A Year with Eleanor." Hancock was an entertainment blogger who got laid off. One day, she read a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt, "Do one thing every day that scares you." She took a year off to deal with her third-life crisis, and Eleanor's inspiration guided her through her "Year of Fear."

Eleanor continues to be on my list of strong women whom I admire. She said, "I am not a gifted person...I had only three assets: I was keenly interested, I accepted every challenge and every opportunity to learn more, and I had great energy and discipline."

Kim Lee says

Interesting but very much "of its time". Unlike today's culture people of Eleanor's era did not talk about their feelings so while you get a very good picture of what she did, and some of what she thought you will not walk away with insights into what she felt after reading this.

Feisty Harriet says

2.5 stars. I was really hoping for more....for more SOMETHING from this book. Perhaps my expectations were just too damn high? Eleanor Roosevelt has always reigned in my mind as a champion for women and for civil rights, and in reading a biography about her you definitely get that sense. However, in her own words, she skips over most of that and focuses on FDR instead. She talks about racism as "the social issue" or something and doesn't address it directly. She does talk about her work for the UN and the Declaration of Human Rights a bit, which I appreciated. But in almost every stage of her life she is so self deprecating and humble that without having already read a biography I wouldn't think she had much to do with anything in regards to women's suffrage, civil rights, human rights, or feminism. Social programs to help poor miners in West Virginia? Yes, she talks about those at length. And she spends a lot of time analyzing the Soviet government, which, during the Cold War was formidable, but those thoughts haven't aged very well. Ditto her opinions on the government in India as it went from a colonial protectorate, to it's own country, and then the split between India and Pakistan.

Honestly, the thing that comes through the most is that Eleanor Roosevelt is a wealthy, privileged, white woman from a well known family, her uncle AND her husband were President for crying out loud. Her life--even during the Depression, or ESPECIALLY during the Depression--was pretty comfortable. She always had money, and connections, and even her retirement "cottage" had 7 bedrooms and two sitting/drawing rooms. She wasn't really involved in improving the lives of the less fortunate until it was right in front of her face. Towards the end she talks at length about how she isn't really invested in social change until she is in direct contact with someone who is suffering. So, she didn't care about childhood hunger until she saw a starving child with her own eyes, THEN it became real. And that surprised me, I guess I thought she was more of a humanitarian than that? To be fair, she did possess a quality of wanting to learn everything, meet everyone, and she rarely said "no" to an opportunity, so for her birth/status in the social pecking order she probably experienced a lot more of the unwashed masses than most people would.

I'd like to point out that a biography gives a completely different perspective of Eleanor Roosevelt, her telling her own life story in her own words, however, does not paint her as a champion of the underdog, the downtrodden, or the common man. And that really surprised me.
