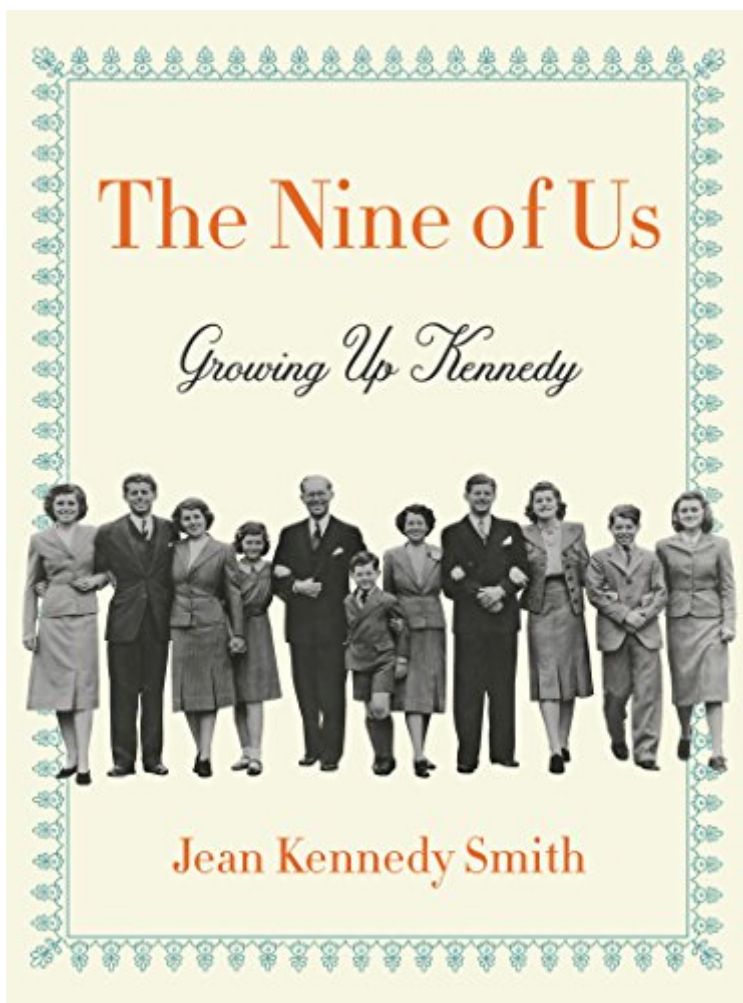


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The Nine Of Us: Growing Up Kennedy



Synopsis

In this evocative and affectionate memoir, Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, the last surviving child of Joe and Rose Kennedy, offers an intimate and illuminating look at a time long ago when she and her siblings, guided by their parents, laughed and learned a great deal under one roof. Prompted by interesting tidbits in the newspaper, Rose and Joe Kennedy would pose questions to their nine children at the dinner table. "Where could Amelia Earhart have gone?" "How would you address this horrible drought?" "What would you do about the troop movements in Europe?" It was a nightly custom that helped shape the Kennedys into who they would become. Before Joe and Rose's children emerged as leaders on the world stage, they were a loving circle of brothers and sisters who played football, swam, read, and pursued their interests. They were children inspired by parents who instilled in them a strong work ethic, deep love of country, and intense appreciation for the sacrifices their ancestors made to come to America. "No whining in this house!" was their father's regular refrain. It was his way of reminding them not to complain, to be grateful for what they had, and to give back. In her remarkable memoir, Kennedy Smith "the last surviving sibling" revisits this singular time in their lives. Filled with fascinating anecdotes and vignettes, and illustrated with dozens of family pictures, *The Nine of Us* vividly depicts this large, close-knit family during a different time in American history. Kennedy Smith offers indelible, elegantly rendered portraits of her larger-than-life siblings and her parents. "They knew how to cure our hurts, bind our wounds, listen to our woes, and help us enjoy life," she writes. "We were lucky children indeed."

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Customer Reviews

THE NINE OF US is a story about a family--and a BIG one, at that. Keep in mind that this is not a book about politics or government--it's a book about a family. Naturally, government service is mentioned, but that's not really the central message of this book. The central theme is the joy and love found within a family--their struggles together, the high points, and the low points. This is a book mostly about children and how they grew up together. The author has mostly fond memories of her big family. She also credits her parents, Rose and Joe, for their diligence: "I am so grateful to our parents for being so focused in their child rearing" The author explains that she wanted to tell the real story about her family: "I wanted to remember them, and my brothers and sisters, as they really were." THE NINE OF US tells the story of 9 kids and two loving--but sometimes strict, parent. The author notes that she was fortunate to be encouraged to keep a journal; that habit became very useful in telling this story. The Kennedy household was a busy household. The father set the example: "Even as a child, Dad was never not working." Hard work and diligence was stressed in the Kennedy household. The values from the parents were traditional Yankee values--hard work, diligence, faith: "To whom much is given . . . From the earliest age, all the children were required to "use our talents and gifts for the good of others and of our country." The parents made it clear that there was "No Whining in This House." The parents also made it clear that "we were not the center of the universe." The father emphasized responsibility. During World War II, the father gave this advice to young Bobby: "It is boys of your age who are going to find themselves in a very changed world, and the only way you can hold up your end is to prepare your mind so that you will be able to accept each situation as it comes along. So THE NINE OF US contains lots of delightful stories about each of the Kennedy children. The stories are mostly light and cheerful, but of course, there was tragedy as well. The first child to be lost was Joe, during WWII: "Fate determined that our family would never be whole again when the news arrived, one hot August day in 1944, that Joe had been lost." Perhaps the saddest part of THE NINE OF US is the story of what befell Rosemary. The parents hoped a surgical procedure would help her, but the

results were devastating: "Little could we understand as well the sadness that befell our beloved Rosemary . . . It is still not clear what happened. Rather than finding relief through the procedure, Rosemary lost most of her ability to walk and communicate. We had been so hopeful, and were devastated." The patriarch of the family "remained heartbroken over the outcome of her surgery for the rest of his life." All in all, I found *THE NINE OF US* to be a tender story--but also a bittersweet story. Having grown up in a large family myself, I appreciate all the wonderful things that a big family offers. The author sums up this story nicely: "Mother and Dad taught us to be thankful to those who came before us and to give back to our fellow man and country. They taught us to never take anyone or anything for granted. I wanted to remember them, and my brothers and sisters, as they really were, and I am grateful to all those who helped make that possible. Advance Review Copy courtesy of Edelweiss.

Having read so many books on the Kennedys--including Ted Kennedy's memoir *True Compass: A Memoir* and Rose Kennedy's *Times to Remember*--I wasn't sure what to expect from Jean Kennedy Smith (former ambassador to Ireland), the youngest Kennedy daughter--and the only daughter to write a memoir. It wasn't exactly what I had hoped for, but I wasn't really disappointed either. Jean Kennedy's memoir is obviously heavily influenced by the family legacy--the knowledge that she is the surviving child of Rose and Joseph Kennedy, whose three sons--and whose family itself--mean so much to so many Americans. With that responsibility in mind, she shares cozy memories, warm and positive ones, of growing up in that family. Modestly, Jean's memories in this book are all shared with a brother or sister or her parents--except when she goes away to college and her roommate (soon to become her close friend) is Ethel Skakel, who will soon fall in love with and marry Jean's older brother Bobby. Other than that, and meeting her own husband (who also became an important help to her brothers), Jean keeps the family front and center in her memoir--and, of course, she's right, that's exactly who we want to hear about. It's a slim book--more about Kennedys growing up than the political years and decisions--and you won't find any scandals--but there's a quiet charm of days gone by, when even adults played touch football on the lawn near the ocean and evening entertainment was family word games, listening to a radio program, or --for the Kennedy children-- the treat of having their father (at one time a movie producer who helped start RKO studios) bring home a new movie to show to the family and friends in the private screening room at Hyannis Port. She mentions current events sparsely as needed--the family life in London before the war, when Joe was U.S. ambassador there (the first Catholic ambassador to Protestant England). Historical events are touched on lightly and infrequently; this is

a personal book, not a history lesson. Unlike her brother Ted, Jean doesn't write about the tough school years at a variety of boarding schools for the boys and Catholic school for the girls. Instead, she describes the (possibly over-idealized) summers together on the Cape. Unlike her mother, she doesn't talk about the family struggles of past generations, or say much about the business of Joe or the frequent long travels of Rose. Biographers pointed out that Joe made many decisions for the boys and Rose was closer in many ways with the girls, and that comes through here, too, although Joe still seems the warmer and more affectionate parent. Rose, shows herself as disciplined, a natural (and ambitious) teacher and a mother who wanted her children to use the summer vacations to develop skills in everything from swimming to dancing to tennis to typing--punctuated with a daily hour for reading (Jack loved this; some of the others found it an unwelcome restriction). Both parents were highly aspirational, instilling in their children the importance of family, of learning, of accomplishing important things in life and in not taking their comforts and good fortune for granted. Rose's memoir will show you a little more the downside--she's honest about hitting the children (Eunice calls it "beating" them) with coat hangers--and her guilt about frequent trips away from home, with Joe taking over many duties, along with the nurses. In her own memoir, Rose and Joe seem very strict, very demanding--high standards and demands mixed with pride and indulgence for their nine children with their high spirits, noise and fun--being sure to keep them unspoiled and engaged in meaningful activities. Jean loves her parents and her brothers and sisters and has nothing bad to say about any of them. She does, briefly, mention the sad times--her oldest brother's death in the war, her eldest sister's botched lobotomy that left her severely mentally and physically impaired, another sister's fatal plane crash when she was barely 28 years old. Then, of course, she mentions the public service of her three brothers and -- briefly, and without much detail, the assassinations of Jack and Bobby. There's not much here about her own children--she knows we want to hear about Jack and Bobby and Teddy and the fun growing up and how great they were as adults and how she loved and idolized them just like so many of us do still--only Jean was there. It's a light book, a fast read, with a photo on almost every open double-page, not on special photo paper so its not very well detailed, but they're great to see, and makes it a bit like a scrapbook feeling. Where else will you read about--and see--the Halloween costumes Jackie designed for her and Jean while first lady--so that they could go trick or treating in cognito with their children? Jean relied a lot on her own journals for the stories she shares. If you are a fan of the Kennedy's, her book is not going to tell you anything shocking or (if you've read a lot) much that's new, but it's Jack and Bobby and Teddy's sister--she's the last of their generation, and she wants to tell us about what it was like back then. Seriously, who could resist grabbing a cup of tea and enjoying her memories?

Excellent book on growing a Kennedy. Mrs. Smith recalls the good and bad times of her life. She reports on the deaths of her siblings and the enormous effort to go on. Excellent book and well worth the time to read it.

Really enjoyed this reading. Wish I had it when I was raising my child. I have always been fascinated with the Kennedy Family and the way they always bounced back from all the tragedies in their family. I could not put the book down until I finished it. Kudos to J.K. Smith for such a short read with valuable lessons.

Fun little book that ignores all of the back story that makes them interesting.

Book dragged in a lot of places.

The book, *The Nine of Us: Growing Up Kennedy* is a great book if you like reading about Joseph and Rose Kennedy and their off springs.

What an account of such an amazing family. Wish they were all still here now. Once again our country is need of leadership such as this.

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