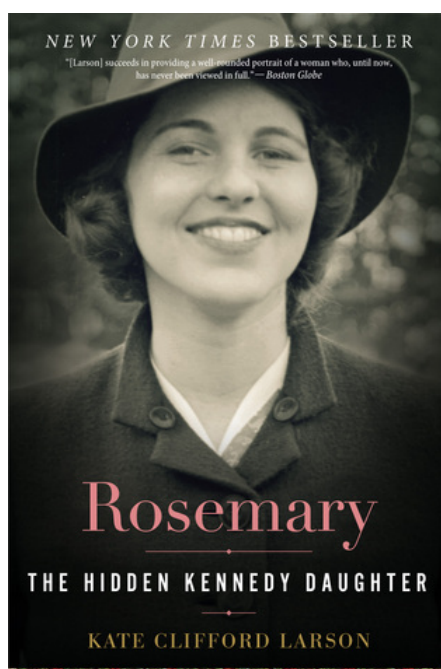




Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter

Kate Clifford Larson

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Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter Kate Clifford Larson
One of *People's* Top Ten Books of 2015

"[Larson] succeeds in providing a well-rounded portrait of a woman who, until now, has never been viewed in full."—*Boston Globe*

?“A biography that chronicles her life with fresh details . . . By making Rosemary the central character, [Larson] has produced a valuable account of a mental health tragedy and an influential family’s belated efforts to make amends.” — *New York Times Book Review*

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. Yet Rosemary was intellectually disabled, a secret fiercely guarded by her powerful and glamorous family.

In *Rosemary*, Kate Clifford Larson uses newly uncovered sources to bring Rosemary Kennedy’s story to light. Young Rosemary comes alive as a sweet, lively girl adored by her siblings. But Larson also reveals the often desperate and duplicitous arrangements the Kennedys made to keep her away from home as she became increasingly difficult in her early twenties, culminating in Joe’s decision to have Rosemary lobotomized at age twenty-three and the family’s complicity in keeping the secret. Only years later did the Kennedy siblings begin to understand what had happened to Rosemary, which inspired them to direct government attention and resources to the plight of the developmentally and mentally disabled, transforming the lives of millions.

“The forgotten Kennedy is forgotten no longer. *Rosemary* is a rare thing, a book about the Kennedys that has something new to say.” — Laurence Leamer, author of *The Kennedy Women*

“Heartbreaking.” — *Wall Street Journal*

Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter Details

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From Reader Review Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter for online ebook

Jennifer says

Tragic.

That is really the only word I can think to describe the life of Rosemary Kennedy.

Kate Clifford Larson gives readers a meticulously researched and highly readable book about the eldest Kennedy daughter, her relationship with her parents and siblings, and ultimately her impact on the special needs community.

At every point in her development, beginning with her botched at-home birth, Joe and Rose Kennedy could tell that Rosemary was different than her siblings. They spared no expense sending her to private schools and making arrangements for her to be "cured," resulting in much tumult which left Rosemary feeling like a failure compared to her uber competitive, successful, and intelligent siblings. The final and most horrific "treatment" being the lobotomy which robbed Rosemary of the majority of the intellect she possessed, as well as much of her gross motor ability.

It is easy in 2015 to call Joe and Rose cruel and heartless -- more concerned with appearances and the family name than with their daughter's actual needs and worth. Indeed, some of their decisions are stupefying and absurd (long after Rosemary's lobotomy, when she is hidden away from the world in Wisconsin, Rose is still obsessed with Rosemary's weight -- upset that the nuns in Wisconsin have let Rosemary put on "a few pounds".) After the lobotomy they kept Rosemary's true condition a secret for years, even from her siblings.

Still, I found myself trying to hold back some judgement on the Kennedy parents, reminding myself that we know so much more now about those with special needs than was known in the 1930s and 40s. I do think that Joe and Rose thought they could "cure" Rose with the right measures.

Whatever the sins of the parents, Rosemary's siblings used their power, influence and money to improve research and opportunities for the special needs community. According to Eunice Kennedy Shriver's son Anthony, "The interest [Rosemary] sparked in my family toward people with special needs will one day go down as the greatest accomplishment that any Kennedy has made on a global basis."

Montzalee Wittmann says

Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter by Kate Clifford Larson is a book that was hard to read due to the content and not due to due to the author in any way. Let's face it, Rosemary's father was a big jerk! This book didn't say this but just read it and common sense sees it. I have read plenty of respectable articles on this family. Let's go through this shall we.

Joe Sr., Rosemary's father, main focus in life was political power, financial power, social power, and being a powerful Catholic. He bullied others to back him in politics, he did insider trading that left many poor but him rich -he was doing this during a birth of one of his children, he didn't believe women should enjoy sex but only should have sex to have children yet he had affairs, he kept his wife pregnant and he was away frequently and she was lonely, when she got so lonely she wanted to leave he berated her and said she was unfit mother and Catholic, he sent Rosemary to school after school to FIX her even though she functioned at a fourth grade level he wanted perfection because that is what he believed in for his family, he was the one

that took Rosemary to the quack and had the lobotomy done on her and lied to the family, his 9 yr old son was afraid enough of him that he thought he would make him disappear too if he didn't please his father, and I could go on.... This is the kind of father Rosemary had. Rosemary was a blight on his social standing, his political ambitions, his social climb, and she couldn't take sacraments due to her retardation. All the things that mattered most to him.

The author didn't seem bias in her writing, she just stated the facts and let you dig out the conclusions. I have read a lot on this family, kind of weird fascination I guess.

Being a nurse too I have read a lot on Freeman and his lobotomy procedures. It got to be a theater act for him. He would sometimes line up the patients and do one right after another to see how many he could do in an hour. He would, on occasion, have an ice pick in each hand and do a procedure at the same time to show the press how same and easy it was! Horrible!

When the discussion of Hitler and his views of sterilizing the mentally handicap, along with the Jews and any others that Hitler felt unfit, in Germany, to me this sounds no different then the start of what I am hearing here in America. If Trump said, "Muslims not only should be banned but sterilized." Many of his supporters would jump all over that! I am not saying America would but you bet some of his supporters would. I know for a fact that some mentally handicap people are being sterilized today by their families or getting an implant to prevent pregnancy. It is just a matter of getting some to agree for whatever reason, or good lawyers.

I did enjoy the information I gleaned from this book and the many pictures that were in there. The author also shared some personal info on the last page. The "good" that came from this? JFK did enact bills for the mentally handicap, Teddy the HIPPA, and a sister donated millions and worked for the handicap. Joe Sr, Karma is a bitch and she gave back to him in the end...stuck in a wheel chair unable to speak or move more than one an arm or leg much for 8 yrs. due to a stroke. I love you Karma...

Katie B says

I'm glad I finally got around to reading this book because for the most part it did a good job separating fact from rumors and misconception. Due to family secrecy and lost or redacted papers, we might not ever know the full story. However, this book is about as thorough and well-researched look we will ever probably get into Rosemary's life. Her story in my opinion is the saddest among a family who has experienced their fair share of tragedy.

Rosemary was the third child of Joe Kennedy Sr. and Rose Kennedy and the eldest daughter. Literally, from birth her life is filled with things that didn't need to happen and negatively affected her quality of life. At the age of 23 a lobotomy was performed on Rosemary and she spent the rest of her life until her death at age 86, institutionalized. Decades passed before the lobotomy became public knowledge and even among Kennedy family siblings some years passed before most of them had a clearer picture of what happened to their sister.

I'll admit I have not been a big fan of most of the Kennedy family, particularly the men, and this book did nothing to alter my opinion. It is apparent that while some family members were researching lobotomies as a possible option and come to the conclusion it was too risky, Joe Sr. in secrecy scheduled the operation, not even telling his wife. While Rosemary intellectually might have been only on a third or fourth grade level, and was having increasingly difficult behavioral problems before the operation, it was obvious right away the procedure was a disaster. Not only was she barely able to communicate, she was now crippled. Extremely sad and frustrating to know this didn't have to happen.

In Rose and Joe Sr.'s defense I will say just in terms of Rosemary's education they did seem to do everything they could and didn't give up in trying to find schooling options that would be a good fit for her. Now personally I don't know why Latin needed to be part of the curriculum for a teenager who was writing at a

third grade level and couldn't write in a straight line, but whatever. I also don't understand their intense scrutiny of her weight either.

In my opinion the behavioral problems that started to become an issue as Rosemary got older were what led to Joe's decision to force the lobotomy. Had there only been intellectual issues I don't think he would have opted to do the operation, I think the official story would be she was "working" at a school and therefore would not be in the limelight as the Kennedy family became more and more involved in politics. While we now know Rosemary before the procedure was sneaking out in the middle of the night at her school, we don't know if something tragic happened during one of these escapes. There have been rumors that there were sexual encounters but because of family secrecy we don't know if this was a fear of what could happen or if something horrible did occur. Regardless it is absolutely tragic that instead of providing her with around the clock supervision which they obviously could afford, Joe Sr. chose the lobotomy.

If there is anything good that came out of this tragedy, it is it had a tremendous impact on advancing special needs and disability causes in this country. Eunice Shriver, Rosemary's sister, went on to create the Special Olympics and both JFK jr. and Teddy Kennedy were involved with different legislation which has led to positive changes in the treatment of those who are not always able to advocate for themselves.

I definitely recommend this book as Rosemary's story is not one that should be forgotten.

Dem says

Kate Clifford Larson delivers a compelling and compassionate account of *Rosemary The Hidden Kennedy*"

I really enjoyed this well written and researched look back at the life of the oldest daughter of the Kennedy family. I had been aware that Rosemary had lived her life in an institution for some time but had no idea of the circumstances that led to her being institutionised and this book is a great insight into her life and indeed the health care system at the time.

I think the author does an excellent job at presenting this account of Rosemary and the Kennedy family and the reader is able to read the book and make up their minds about how they feel about the way in which Rosemarie was treated. I was afraid that the account of Rosemarie's life would be overshadowed by the politics of the Kennedy's and details of elections and deaths of Jack and Bobby but I have to praise Kate Clifford Larson for her presentation of the facts and details surrounding the life of the Kennedy's. She presents the facts reverent to the story and we get quite a clear picture without weeding through unnecessary information.

Rosemary's story will stay with me a long time as it made me wonder at the life she could have had under different circumstances and how I wished her father Joe had accepted Rosemary and hadn't gone through with the operation. My thoughts were with other families who didn't have the means or the connections to care for loved ones with the same circumstances.

A wonderful well written and emotional read that will stay with me for a long time.

I listened to this book on audible and the narrator was excellent but I did miss out on the photographs included in the hard copy.

Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says

I learned, I was absorbed, I was emotionally invested = 5 stars.

Review of the audio.

Rosemary Kennedy, the third child and first daughter born to Rose and Joe Kennedy, was intellectually disabled due to a trauma during her birth. It was both interesting and devastating to learn how the Kennedys, the medical field, and the mainstream U.S. culture, felt about the disability at the time. I hope we've made some strides in this area, but there is definitely room to grow.

The Kennedys were staunch in their beliefs that, as a young child, Rosemary could grow developmentally and reach the achievements, both physically, academically, and cognitively, of her siblings. As she got older, the Kennedys were tireless in their efforts to find an appropriate school for Rosemary, where she would excel. She had so many transitions, and transitions were hard for her. As she got older, Rosemary had some anger and outbursts more frequently, and the family went in search of another type of care for her. They literally tried all of what was available for her at the time, and some of these things were positive (like the Devereaux School which was ahead of its time) and others were traumatic and destructive. The author follows from before Rosemary's birth (how her parents met, the two sons born before her) all the way through the end of Rosemary's life and after.

This was a nonfiction book filled with well-researched detail about the Kennedy family and the time period. Rosemary is whom it's all about, and she was on my heart. I can't help but wish she had been born in a different time when intellectual disabilities were more accepted, where treatments were safer, and where she could be free to be the lovely, radiant person she was. Even if they didn't always express it how I would have, I was struck by her family's love for her, especially Eunice's devotion. The last few paragraphs of the book include some thoughts from Rose who had a conflicted relationship with Rosemary, but early in her life, she had been her biggest advocate and protector. Rose discussed what she felt the purpose of Rosemary's life had been for the family. That was touching. She finally got it. Or a little bit of it.

I never felt bogged down in the details on this one. It was a pleasure learning about the time period, which gave context to Rosemary's life. Overall, this was a solid listen.

Michelle says

I've long been interested in Rosemary Kennedy's life as she hasn't been all that "hidden" in my eyes. I'm fascinated/disgusted/horrified by the lobotomy "craze" that happened in the middle part of last century and have done a ton of research in the area, not only about Rosemary but also others tangentially "famous" (e.g. Tennessee Williams' sister) victims and other "regular" folk (ahem, mostly women, as they were by far the vast majority of patients). Full disclosure: my interest in this was piqued at an early age due to certain vagaries in my family history.

Anyhow, despite extensive, extensive research I can honestly say that this is the first time I truly believed Rosemary Kennedy was severely developmentally delayed and not just a little wilder/less polished/less ambitious than her Kennedy cohorts. The author had access to never-before-released correspondence and you can see that Rosemary very much operated at a 4th grade level even as an adult. Obviously this fact does

not support the lobotomy, but one does get a sense that her parents were trying to do anything and everything to help her. And as a reader I did come to have some sympathy for their fear as parents. They had a very beautiful, very high profile daughter, who had the mind of an 8 year old, and trying to protect her in the "real world" was no small task. While by no means do I view Joe or Rose Kennedy as altruistic, I will say that after reading this book I no longer view them as complete monsters. People made hugely bad decisions, but this book does make the reader better understand the extreme complexity of the situation.

This was also the first I read about Rosemary's experience with the nuns and other residents at Coletta. She truly had a loving, close network of support and friends for 70-ish years. Although my heart breaks for the fact her family ignored her for many decades before bringing her back into the fold, it was a small relief to know that she was loved, and cared for, and looked after.

My only real ding on this was that the focus is still too much on the Kennedys as a whole, and not just Rosemary. I had a hard time with the hypothesis that the Kennedys are who they are because of her...it's very clear no one visited her for many decades and then the remorse set in. Some good has certainly come from it, in the end, but I don't for once buy that she drove the ambitions of the others. She was basically squirreled away and they were all fine by that...for a time. (Side note: I had no idea Joe Jr. was such an unrepentant Nazi...HE was supposed to be the President?!? Not JFK? Yuck!) Nonetheless, a worthwhile and affecting read.

Mjdrean says

Wow, what a pair Joe and Rose Kennedy were! It's a wonder the kids turned out as well as they did. But oh my oh my poor Rosemary. If she had any happiness at all it was because of the love and protection her brothers and sisters gave her as well as the many professionals hired to hide her. But in the end they were all powerless to save her from her parents. This book was just so hard to read because of the pain and misery heaped on her by her parents, both more concerned with their reputations and themselves. The research was so thorough and the writing done so well. Unfortunately, I found myself rushing through to end the pain. The bright spot though was the fervor with which the siblings tackled the problem of the mentally challenged, especially Eunice.

***TANYA* says**

I'm astounded at all Rosemary went through because she was "different" from her other siblings. The treatment she received from her parents is heart breaking. I learned a lot from the Kennedy family. Smh.

Diane S ? says

Rosemary was the Kennedy's first daughter, third child, suffered from a home birth gone wrong and basically disappeared from public view after her early twenties. This is the story of what her life was like and the story of why she had to disappear.

I know it was a different world back then, they did not have the resources for those developmentally disabled, even retarded was not a word thrown around back then, many would just drop these type of

individuals off at asylums or sanitarium to be forgotten. So in this way Rosemary was fortunate to be born into a family of wealth, a family that could seek out and pay for what was available. Lucky in this way, yet it was a double edged sword which you will understand if you read her story. Eugenics was promoted heavily then, ignorance the mainstay of the medical profession and others who just did not understand and tended to classify all individuals with defects, whether mental or physical, the same.

It is hard to read this well researched and well told true life story and not be affected. It hit me personally because I was raised with a cousin, only five days younger than myself, who suffered a terrible accident at the age of five, the end result being a traumatic brain injury. He would never be right, developmentally only with the age of a ten or eleven year old, pretty much the same as Rosemary. I don't think Rose or Joe Kennedy came off looking to good after reading this, although I believe they loved their daughter, she was not their prime consideration. Not Rosemary as a person anyway, was the feeling I received.

Chrissie says

Concise, well-researched and to the point!

Of interest to all seeking information about the Kennedy family and treatment of those with mental, psychological and physical disabilities in the US during the last century.

So much can be said about the Kennedy family and so much has been written. This book focuses only upon those aspects that are directly related to Rosemary Kennedy(1918-2005), the third of Joseph and Rose Kennedy's nine children. At delivery the midwife delayed birth until the doctor could arrive. This lead to mental, physical and psychological disabilities that with time became strikingly apparent in Rosemary.

The book covers how the parents dealt with the problem, who decided what and why and what actions were taken by the siblings. Although Rosemary was hidden publicly her existence shaped the entire Kennedy family.

The author does an excellent job of providing all relevant details, while at the same time eliminating those that are not necessary to the central focus on Rosemary and care of those with disabilities. Every event is supported with relevant historical, medical and scientific analysis. To understand what happened the reader must be made aware of historical family, political and medical facts. That the Kennedy family highly valued its Irish Catholic descent, the family's orientation toward career, fame and success, the strength of the Eugenic Movement in that era, scientific trends supporting lobotomies and educational trends all influenced the decisions made. I appreciated that the author indicated when the reliability of existing statements and documents should perhaps be questioned. Conflicting evidence is also provided.

The book doesn't provide the internal thoughts of family members. We watch what they do, but actions say a lot. Deeds say more than words often.

The reader cannot help but consider guilt, not just who was at fault but how we behave if we feel ourselves to be at fault.

The audiobook is narrated by Bernadette Dunne. It is clear and easy to follow, except that at the beginning it is too speedy. She slows down after a while.

A very good book that doesn't spread out in all different directions. Interesting, concise and moving.

Miranda Reads says

The stigma of mental illness is still alive and well.

When you hear "the Kennedys" you think of JFK, Jackie-O and so much more - but what about Rosemary?

If you haven't heard of the eldest Kennedy daughter, then you aren't alone. Rosemary was **a dirty skeleton** in that prestigious family's closet and they (in particular her parents) were terrified of her getting out.

Rosemary Kennedy was born to an **incredibly competitive and religious family**. Rose (Rosemary's mother) wanted **the perfect family** and she was going to have it. No. Matter. What.

To give an example: if one child began to gain a few pounds above average, his diet was adjusted. If another began to lose weight, Rose would start slipping fatty foods onto his plate.

Right from the start, Rose could see that her namesake was **falling behind**. Rosemary was the slowest to walk, talk, read and write. Rosemary was behind on everything.

However, this was not current day with specialized therapy and treatments for the intellectually disabled. This was the early 1900s and:

Treatment for people with disabilities and mental illness in prewar America reveals a profoundly ignorant medical establishment and educational community.

And deeply religious Rose also received a clear stance from the church:

At that time the Roman Catholic Church routinely refused the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation to intellectually disabled children, especially those with Down syndrome.

Despite all of this **Rose sought a solution** - sending her daughter from one specialty boarding school to another.

Rosemary grew up **intensely obsessed** with pleasing her family - which their expectations would often be far above her capabilities. As she reached her late teens and twenties, she still had the mentality of a thirteen-year-old - as seen by her letters:

I have gone down between 5 and 7 pounds already living on salads, egg at night, meat once a day, fish if I want, spinach and soup. Wait to [sic] you see me. I will be thin when Jack sees me.

Around the same time there was a...movement...of sorts sweeping through the medical world.

Freeman and a handful of colleagues around the world were convinced that lobotomies were the much-longed-for cure for deep depression, mental illness, and violent, erratic, and hyperactive behavior.

A lobotomy - which could be as "simple" as inserting a medical instrument through the ocular cavity and **snipping a bit of brain tissue** - was exactly what happened.

Joe Kennedy - Rosemary's father - took her to a man. This man:

believed that surgical intervention into the brain to treat psychological disorders did not require the extensive surgical training that neurosurgeons spent years acquiring.

And he gave Rosemary's brain four snips. At the fourth, her language stopped, her motor control became practically nonexistent and her entire personality became a shell.

Such a prominent family could not have the story of this leaking to the public - it would absolutely ruin them. But how in the world could they cover this up?

Overall - a fascinating book. This one felt really well-researched - the sheer amount of direct quotes from letters wowed me. **Truly a fascinating read.**

Audiobook Comments

Bernadette Dunne read this riveting history and she was a fabulous reader. Really enjoyed the narration.

Blog | Instagram

Susan (aka Just My Op) says

This is a story of a poor little rich girl, Rosemary Kennedy, the hidden Kennedy. Being rich isn't going to solve all your problems, and could just contribute to making them worse.

Starting with a horrific birth practice, Rosemary's life was never easy. Especially in a family that honors competition and winning above all else.

This is also a story of a girl, and then a woman, whose life should never have been as it was. Even after her traumatic birth, it could have been so much better for her. But we certainly don't want to be embarrassed by a child who is "dull" when her eight siblings shine. My gosh, it was hard to live up to the Kennedy name.

The story is straightforward in its telling. Rosemary's story is anything but straightforward. The poor child was bounced around so often that even a normal child without mental disabilities would have trouble coping. And then there was the traumatic and ill-advised surgery, barbaric.

Some of the children were very good with Rosemary, especially Eunice. It seems Joe, Sr. threw money instead of love at the problem. Rosemary adored her father, and would do anything to please him. And Rose, Rosemary's mother, was not honest about her daughter when she sent her various places, and was not honest in her memoirs. When things got tough, it seems her first action of choice was to take a vacation.

Some of the people who took care of Rosemary sound wonderful, and I'm glad Rosemary had those people in her life..

This book caused me some anger, and much sadness. I lost some respect for some people. Fortunately, things have become better when working with people with mental disabilities, but we're far from winning a gold star.

I was given an advance reader's copy of this book for review. Even the advance copy contained some lovely photographs, which I am sure will be even better in the finished, published edition.

Juli says

Rosemary Kennedy, the third child of Joe & Rose Kennedy, was born in 1918. The doctor was late in coming to the home birth, and a nurse instructed Rose to hold her legs together and not push, to delay the baby's arrival til the doctor could get there. This delay deprived Rosemary of oxygen, leaving her learning disabled and mentally challenged. The Kennedy family was wealthy and powerful. In that day and age, having a retarded or mentally ill family member was a stigma, an embarrassment that the Kennedy family did not want. Rosemary's mental challenges were kept a secret. She was moved from school to school for decades as her parents searched for a way to make her seem "normal." When it finally was realized that Rosemary would never reach the intelligence and poise of her siblings, her father made a chilling decision. He had Rosemary lobotomized. She lived the rest of her life tucked away in an institution in Wisconsin. Her personality and character almost completely erased. Rose Kennedy publicly stated that an "accident" had rendered her daughter mentally incapacitated. The truth would not be revealed for decades.

I listened to the audiobook version of this biography by Kate Clifford Larson. Larson gives background on the parents, the family, and the competitive, demanding lifestyle of the Kennedy clan. Rosemary just didn't fit into the family, causing frustration for her parents and siblings. Decades were spent trying to "fix" her, rather than help her live within her capabilities.

As a mother, this book was hard for me to take. I am so glad that I didn't grow up in an age where families hid children who weren't perfect and where there were no services or assistance to help them grow into functioning adults. And I was shocked that Joe Kennedy would choose to have his daughter lobotomized to keep her from embarrassing the family. What a horrific and terrible choice! Then he hid her away in an institution in the midwest and never saw her again. Wow -- how cold and callous. The political aspirations of his sons were more important than the life of his mentally challenged daughter....so he had her lobotomized. For 20 years nobody in the family asked where Rosemary was or attempted to visit her because Joe had complete control over his family. When he died, Rose and the family visited Rosemary and even brought her home for visits. Rose tried to say that she didn't realize what was done to Rosemary, but documents have since proven that was not the case.

Some good did come from the events though. The Kennedy family, especially Eunice Shriver, backed many important programs for special education, including the Special Olympics. In later years, the Kennedy siblings did admit that they had a retarded sister and that the care and quality of life for those with mental challenges should be a priority.

Rose Marie "Rosemary" Kennedy died in the Wisconsin institution in 2005 at the age of 85.

This book does a great job of presenting facts about Rosemary's life, before and after her surgery. It details what the family did to educate and try to accommodate Rosemary's limitations and mood swings. Larson doesn't pull punches about how mental illness, retardation and physical deformities were considered a stigma, something to be hidden away. The concept of Eugenics was big at the time, and declared that any abnormalities were due to genetic inferiority. The Kennedy Clan kept Rosemary a secret to prevent any

damage to the family's social standing. They weren't the only wealthy, powerful family to do so -- the practice was common. So sad. But later efforts by the Kennedy family paved the way for education programs, social services and much better care for mentally and physically challenged children and adults. I'm glad that some good came from the situation in the end. And, Rosemary was very well treated and loved by the nuns at the Wisconsin institution where she lived out the rest of her life.

The audiobook is narrated by Bernadette Dunne. She reads at a nice pace. Her voice is pleasant and easily understood. I have partial hearing loss, but was able to easily understand Dunne's reading. The audiobook is almost 8 hours in length.

Kate Clifford Larson presents a well-rounded history of Rosemary, and the Kennedy Family's attempts to help her. She gives details both from Rosemary's point of view and the family's. She also includes historical facts and the era's attitudes towards the mentally challenged to explain why certain decisions were made, not to excuse those choices. The book is very well researched and written, but disturbing.

Petra X says

I can't finish this book. I can't get past the author and her attitude. At this point Rosemary is 16 in yet another expensive school where she is supposedly doing ok. Her brother, Joe Jnr goes to Europe where Hitler had come to power and persecution of Jews is on the rise. He writes to his father that he has heard much condemnation of Hitler and his party but he feels he should be given a chance.

He says that Germany is in economic ruins and the people are despondent. Hitler though gives the people hope and a common enemy, the Jews. It was excellent psychology, Joe Jnr wrote but this dislike of Jews was well-founded. (view spoiler) Joe went on to claim that the 'brutality' (is that what he calls it) towards the Jews must have been necessary to secure the whole-hearted support of the people - in every revolution you have to expect some kind of bloodshed.

Then we have the bombshell.

"Perhaps more shockingly, Joe also believed that Hitler's sterilization programme was a great thing. He said it would do away with many of the disgusting specimens of men which inhabit the earth."

Whatever those two Nazi-sympathisers Joe and his son felt, this is history. But it is the author who wrote "Perhaps more shockingly". She feels it is more shocking to approve of sterilization, because his sister is retarded and comes under that programme, than it is to not only approve of but applaud the persecution and murder of the Jews.

She wrote this, it is her feelings, not the Kennedys knowing that the family were already afraid of Rosemary having a baby because it could be retarded.

This author and I think quite differently about the world. She is writing in the present with the benefit of hindsight and still can write "perhaps more shockingly" knowing of the Holocaust. In my world sterilization can never be worse, more shocking, or even compared with murder. I don't want to read any more of what this author has to say. I am disgusted and sick at her attitude. If she hadn't felt the need to interpret Joe Jnr's attitudes herself, I would have read this book, but it's spoiled for me now.

First thoughts after a couple of chapters(view spoiler)

Chris says

I don't usually read bios or memoirs but I remember Rosemary Kennedy from when I was a child. She was the forgotten Kennedy, the one we knew nothing about (her family made sure of that). At least until now. Heartbreaking, disturbing but essential reading. Having read her biography I will always remember Rosemary as one of the people who forever changed the way we as a society treat those with disabilities.
