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The Huntress: The Adventures, Escapades, And Triumphs Of Alicia Patterson: Aviatrix, Sportswoman, Journalist, Publisher



Synopsis

From National Book Award “winner Michael J. Arlen and screenwriter Alice Arlen, here is the fascinating, adventurous life of Alicia Patterson, who became, at age thirty-four, one of the youngest and most successful newspaper publishers in America when she founded Newsday. With *The Huntress*, the Arlens give us a revealing picture of the lifestyle and traditions of the Patterson-Medill publishing dynasty “one of the country’s most powerful and influential newspaper families” but also Alicia’s rebellious early years and her dominating father, Joseph Patterson. Founder and editor of the *New York Daily News*, Patterson was a complicated and glamorous figure who in his youth had reported on Pancho Villa in Mexico and had outraged his conservative Chicago family by briefly espousing socialism. Not once but twice, first at age twenty, Alicia agreed to marry men her father chose, despite having her own more interesting suitors. He encouraged her to do the difficult training required for an aviation transport license; in 1934 she became only the tenth woman in America to receive one. Patterson brought her along to London to meet with Lord Beaverbrook, to Rome to meet Mussolini, and to Moscow in 1937, at the time of Stalin’s show trials, where a young George Kennan took her under his wing. Alicia caught the journalism bug writing for *Liberty* magazine, an offshoot of the *Daily News*. A trip to French Indochina highlighted her hunting skills and made the sultan of Johor an ardent admirer; another trip would involve India, the dangerous sport of pigsticking, several maharajas, and a tiger hunt. A third marriage, to Harry Guggenheim, blew hot and cold but it did last; it was with him that she started *Newsday* in a former car dealership on Long Island. Governor Adlai E. Stevenson, two-time Democratic candidate for president, would be one of her last admirers. With access to family archives of journals and letters, Michael and Alice Arlen have written an astonishing portrait of a maverick newspaperwoman and an intrepid adventurer, told with humor, compassion, and a profound understanding of a time and place. (With black-and-white illustrations throughout)

Book Information

Hardcover: 368 pages

Publisher: Pantheon (August 23, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 110187113X

ISBN-13: 978-1101871133

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.4 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #45,382 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #104 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists](#) #201 in [Books > History > World > Women in History](#) #770 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Women](#)

Customer Reviews

The biography *THE HUNTRESS: THE ADVENTURES, ESCAPADES, AND TRIUMPS OF ALICIA PATTERSON* by Alice Arlen and Michael J. Arlen, caught my eye not because I had ever heard of Ms. Patterson but because she was from Chicago. Ms. Patterson, related to the Medill family of publishing fame, was married off by her father, several times, which didn't last. Eventually choosing someone whom her father did not approve of, and she wasn't too fond of herself. She was ambitious, not something that was popular at the time, the 1930s, certainly not for young women. She wanted to do it all. Namely start a newspaper, which seemed to be in her blood. She founded *Newsday*, which grew under her leadership as founder and editor, eventually winning Pulitzer prizes. Along the way of her career path, she faced obstacles. In an unhappy marriage, to Harry Guggenheim, who did not want to share the spotlight with his wife and certainly did not want her to usurp the shine from him, she had an ongoing relationship on the side with up-and-coming political candidate who was married at the time and quite unsure of himself, Adlai Stevenson. Drama, marriages, many, as well as historical references along the way. This book has plenty to keep your interest if the publishing industry and big money of big leaders of the time are of interest to you.

I have a soft spot for biographies about women from this era - the early 1900s through the 1950s or so. They truly were the trail blazers for the choices and lives modern first world women can/do have today. There were so many limitations placed on women that we are unable to fully imagine now and yet there they were, quite simply charming, begging, finagling, sneaking or charging ahead to do things that were scandalous, daring, record breaking and amazing. Certainly, the tragic and magnificent Karen Blixen and Beryl Markham or Amelia Earhart come to mind. Now Alicia Patterson (Guggenheim) has a story to be shared. I had high hopes for *The Huntress*. In some ways, it was a fascinating look at a co-dependent, morose and controlling extended family. The background was rich, but far too long and detailed. Honestly, I spent the first third of this book wondering if I had misunderstood and it was a biography of the entire family rather than Alicia. Additionally, there was a sense of looking in from a back window like a gossip spreading neighbor in places - almost as if

the author(s) had difficulty choosing the voice with which to tell this tale. I came away feeling like I knew a lot more about her father, Joe Patterson and his political views, depression, alcoholism and bad marriage than about Alicia or her personality and motivations. (100 pages less and the book would still have been just as good.) She did accomplish a number of things, but I am not convinced she was of the same caliber as the Ladies Blixen, Markham, or Earhart. All that aside, this is a good book and looking back at the way lives were lived compared to now was compelling. Six days sailing to get from New York to Germany, two days on a train from Chicago to NYC and if you were wealthy you could communicate quickly in an emergency via a telegram, no air conditioning, and news was a once a day activity. The collection of photographs sprinkled throughout this book are fascinating.

Like so many people, Alicia Patterson did not find her footing in life until she was well into adulthood. Unfortunately, this biography details her childhood and young adulthood as intricately as the second half of her life. Half the book is dedicated to the doings of a pampered young woman who liked to party, learned to fly, went on safaris and shot leopards, and married unhappily twice before she met her third husband. Somewhat at loose ends after marrying the wealthy Henry Guggenheim, she jumped at an opportunity that dropped in her lap -- to buy a struggling local newspaper. As the daughter of Joseph Patterson, Chicago newspaper publisher, Alicia had some experience around the news business. She was able to whip the newspaper, renamed Newsday, into shape and make it more than a local rag. As a woman who had to defy expectations to do anything other than take care of her husband, she would seem to have been something of a feminist, but there's no evidence from this account that she ever hired women as reporters or editors or did anything to further anyone's career other than her own.

While I was familiar with some of these names in general - Medill (school of journalism), Marshall and Fields (department stores), and Guggenheim (obviously), I knew little about the people behind those names and had never heard of Alicia Patterson. But her story sounded interesting - a woman trailblazing in a male dominated world, particularly in publishing at a time when newspapers and their publishers carried significant social and political clout. So despite being unfamiliar with Patterson, I was intrigued by this book. Written by Alice and Michael Arlen, it is a fascinating story, not just of Alicia but of Chicago's Patterson family. These were the idle rich with enough dysfunction even by today's reality show standards. The book lays the groundwork for Alicia's story by giving a comprehensive look at her parents and the world she was born into. Alicia's truly was a

life of adventure at a time when women were expected to be content as an extension of their husband. I wasn't sure a biography on someone I had never heard of would keep my interest but this did. It flows easily and does a good job of capturing society in the first half of the 20th century. Alicia was only 56 when she died but fit more in those years than many of us can imagine. So whether you are familiar with Alicia or not, this is a fascinating biography of someone worth getting to know.

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