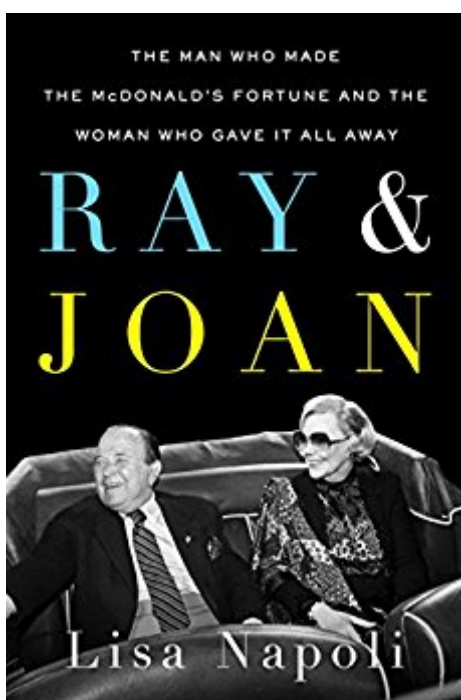


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Ray & Joan: The Man Who Made The McDonald's Fortune And The Woman Who Gave It All Away



Synopsis

The movie *The Founder*, starring Michael Keaton, focused the spotlight on Ray Kroc, the man who amassed a fortune as the chairman of McDonald's. But what about his wife Joan, the woman who became famous for giving away his fortune? Lisa Napoli tells the fascinating story behind the historic couple. *Ray & Joan* is a quintessentially American tale of corporate intrigue and private passion: a struggling Mad Men-era salesman with a vision for a fast-food franchise that would become one of the world's most enduring brands, and a beautiful woman willing to risk her marriage and her reputation to promote controversial causes that touched her deeply. Ray Kroc was peddling franchises around the country for a fledgling hamburger stand in the 1950s. McDonald's, it was called when he entered a St. Paul supper club and encountered a beautiful young piano player who would change his life forever. The attraction between Ray and Joan was instantaneous and instantly problematic. Yet even the fact that both were married to other people couldn't derail their roller coaster of a romance. To the outside world, Ray and Joan were happy, enormously rich, and giving. But privately, Joan was growing troubled over Ray's temper and dark secret, something she was reluctant to publicly reveal. Those close to them compared their relationship to that of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. And yet, this volatility paved the way for Joan's transformation into one of the greatest philanthropists of our time. A force in the peace movement, she produced activist films, books, and music and ultimately gave away billions of dollars, including landmark gifts to the Salvation Army and NPR. Together, the two stories form a compelling portrait of the twentieth century: a story of big business, big love, and big giving.

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Customer Reviews

What a great story!!! Anyone who listens to NPR hears that it has received underwriting from the estate of Joan Kroc. How that came to be is an enlightening, inspiring, surprising and, yes, sexy story. This is a story about a business, an illicit affair that became a complicated but amazing marriage between two very different people who nonetheless shared a passion for each other and for success, and about one of the most unorthodox and effective philanthropists of modern times. As Lisa Napoli explains in this compelling narrative, the story of how Ray Kroc made a concept into today's McDonald's would not have happened without his wife Joan. This book is filled with surprises, secrets and oddities. Who would have thought that the woman who gave more than a billion dollars to the Salvation Army also coveted jewels (like a \$3 million Faberge egg) and flew her private jet to Vegas for very high stakes gambling binges? Highly recommended.

* Was Ray Kroc really "The Founder" of McDonald's? A new movie starring Michael Keaton in the title role - suggests he wasn't. The actual truth is more complicated.* Lisa Napoli's "Ray & Joan" is a sparkling new history that spans from 1902 - the year McDonald's chairman Ray Kroc was born - to the present day - placing everything in the context of America's obsession with fast-food - recreating the entrepreneurial atmosphere of the 1930s through the 1960s - in ways which crackle with electricity and excitement - while exploring the mysteries of a marriage between two people who could not have been more starkly different in domestic and political temperament.* Whatever antipathy some might have for fast food and the lives of the "top one percent" - it was billions of burgers and fries sold by McDonald's - which built the fortune Ray's wife Joan inherited after Ray died in 1984, triggering a \$3 billion charitable giving spree of the likes not seen before nor since in Southern California. Joan was the greatest female philanthropist of her time - and yet I wonder how many people know her name - or even Ray's name, for that matter.-----* With the

corporate vaults at McDonald's barred from prying eyes - Ms. Napoli interviews company survivors, friends, associates and their children - poring over court documents and scores of publications - uncovering new details about how Ray Kroc - a jovial, larger-than-life and imperious blue-eyed man from Chicago - took control of the Golden Arches from Dick and Mac McDonald of San Bernardino, California - who themselves arrived from New Hampshire during the 1920s. Ray bought the automated fast-food ideas the brothers unveiled in 1948 - which Ray himself did not see until 1954 - for \$2.7 million in 1961, making them his own. He then erased the brothers from his life. The brothers were fine staying small. But it was Ray who transformed McDonald's into a global empire.* Simultaneously, Ray courts and breaks the hearts of many women - marrying and discarding two of them - while carrying a torch for Joan Mansfield Smith, a beautiful piano-playing blonde twenty-six years his junior - who he meets in Minnesota in 1957 - when she was 28 and married to someone else. Theirs would become a union for the ages, filled with booze and brawls and the kind of behind-the-scenes, plate-throwing turbulence you'd find in a movie - but wrapped in the benevolent flag of the Golden Arches.-----* I thought I knew most everything about Ray and Joan Kroc. But Ms. Napoli engagingly reveals new details about how Ray enlisted financial wizard Harry Sonneborn to recruit investors - to help him "buy out" the brothers McDonald; how Sonneborn was the brains behind taking McDonald's public in 1965, turning its officers into instant millionaires - and how Sonneborn himself later quit, cashed out his stock and then diminished in Ray's account of the company's history.* The author also explores how Joan accepted Ray's marriage proposal in 1961, but then changed her mind weeks later. They finally marry in 1969 - but then Joan files for divorce in 1971 - presumably because of Ray's non-stop drinking. A few months later, she changes her mind again, rescinding her filing.* Meanwhile, Joan's charitable contributions are still being discovered today because she donated impulsively, writing checks while demanding anonymity. A long list of beneficiaries never before published in a single volume is provided - yet its completeness, the author writes, is uncertain.* Other, better known highlights are re-visited, e.g., Ray buying and saving the San Diego Padres from moving to Washington, D.C.; Ray taking over the P.A. during the team's 1974 home opener, apologizing to fans for their "stupid" and "lousy" play; Joan becoming the team's owner after Ray dies in 1984, the same year the team makes it to its first World Series - just three months after a nearby McDonald's franchise becomes the scene of what was then - the worst mass shooting in U.S. history.-----* As Ms. Napoli describes, from 1984 onward, Joan became "Saint Joan," a larger-than-life figure in her own right, released from the shackles of playing the obedient wife of a hard-drinking tycoon. Ray was a dedicated Republican - and would have loved Joan's \$87 million gift to the Salvation Army - (and another \$1.5 billion she gave

posthumously in 2003). But he would've recoiled at her support of the Democratic Party and her \$225 million gift to NPR (National Public Radio). By the time Joan was done, she had given billions to the homeless, to hospitals and to AIDS treatment centers; she had produced books and films about alcoholism; she had supported anti-nuclear causes and given to universities, parks and zoos.* Yet Joan was no saint - and the author notes her contradictions and occasionally petty behavior. She told raunchy jokes and kicked people out of parties to make room for others she preferred. She saw herself as an "egalitarian spirit" - perhaps because of her own dirt poor beginnings - but had a blind spot about her priceless jewelry and royal lifestyle. To some, she was a chain-smoking prohibitionist and a sometimes apathetic philanthropist - who couldn't wait to sneak out to smoke a cigarette - or to jump on her private jet for some frivolous reason. She also embraced Ray's habit of having others fire people she didn't like, e.g., she dumped her ex-son-in-law as her proxy on the McDonald's board - by flying in her chief advisor from Chicago to deliver the axe - even though he "lived just up the street from her."** Yet there's something beguiling about Ms. Napoli's prose - which enhances the paradox of Joan Kroc - without diminishing the achievements which made her the most beloved woman in San Diego's two-hundred-and-fifty-year history. Rarely have so many business- and charity-related details - been packed into a single, fast-moving volume. "Ray & Joan" is so entertaining that it glides, page after page. I didn't want it to end. But when it does, the author adds a beautifully detailed postscript - that reveals what became of all the key players in the McDonald's empire - and to those closest to Ray and Joan.* Before their tumultuous "reign" - San Diego had been a sleepy conservative town that some believe Joan molded into her own image - to be more inclusive and caring, while honoring Ray's patriotism. Despite their roots in the upper Midwest, locals will always feel Ray and Joan Kroc belong to San Diego.* In sum, Ms. Napoli has provided a spectacular chronicle filled with the grand themes of epic fiction. But this is non-fiction. As a result, in my view, "Ray & Joan" is a sterling work of classic journalism - and one of the best books of ANY year.

I heard that Lisa Napoli's *RAY AND JOAN: THE MAN WHO MADE THE MCDONALD'S FORTUNE AND THE WOMAN WHO GAVE IT ALL AWAY* told a different story than the movie *THE FOUNDER*, which is in theaters now, so I wanted to read the book first. I'm glad I did as it will give me some insight before I see the movie. The biography of McDonald's founder and his third wife is a compelling story of how the *McDonald's* came to change the way Americans eat, successfully turning fast food dining into a family activity, and how he made thousands of people

rich through franchises. Beyond developing a billion-dollar franchise business, the book shares an intimate story of the man behind the golden arches, how he came from meager beginnings, persevered as a salesman and when a bit down on his luck, met two brothers who were running the original McDonald's and set out to become a partner to take the company to greater heights. The story does not end with his vision or hiring the right team to help make his ideas come true. Through his work, he meets a woman, his future wife, Joan. It is not until after Ray dies, that Joan is able to let her true personality shine alongside generosity for the causes that are meaningful to her. Her visions about how to share their good fortune and with whom are much different from what her late husband would have been. Unlike Ray, she is not looking for recognition or publicity. She just wants to share her largesse for the sake of wanting to do something good for others and because she can. RAY AND JOAN is a fascinating look at the history of McDonald's, the personality of Ray Kroc, and a woman with more money than she can possibly spend in one lifetime, let alone beyond, and how she chooses to spend it.

This book is really nothing more than a rehash of newspaper articles and gives little real insight. I doubt this was the author's intent but she has painted a portrait of a frivolous, shallow, self centered gold digger who impulsively scattered Ray Kroc's fortune about in impulsive, feel good bursts, that is what was left of it after her compulsive gambling and adolescent spending. Not that the alcoholic Ray would have done much better.

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