

**Newsweek**

## Woman Waging Peace

Swanee Hunt's memoir explores some painful events.

By Karen Fragala Smith

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Jan. 22, 2007 issue - Swanee Hunt's life story is as modestly opulent as a meal of black-eyed peas and corn bread served on fine china. Her father, a self-made oil magnate, preached hard work and frugality yet jetted around the world on a private plane. Swanee was born out of wedlock to a mistress 30 years Hunt's junior, who was "kept" in a modest home near his lavish estate. After the death of Hunt's first wife, Swanee's parents married and she moved into the home of the father she hardly knew. There, she developed the tenet that would determine her life's direction: "Every person is responsible for changing the world."

Her engaging new memoir, "Half-Life of a Zealot" (393 pages. *Duke University Press*), tracks that aspiration from her early role as a preacher's wife to her current position as director of Harvard's Women and Public Policy Program and chair of the Women Waging Peace network. It is an intensely personal book. Hunt, 56, describes a miscarriage, the breakup of her first marriage, her disillusionment with organized religion and her constant need to prove her autonomy. She runs a marathon, completes a Ph.D. in theology and treks through Nepal.

Eventually, she embraces her family name—and fortune. "To be indelicate," Hunt writes with typical bluntness, "money bought a seat at the table." She establishes a foundation that funds mental-health services and combats poverty. Seeing that the Clintons share her commitment to social causes, she becomes a top fund-raiser for the Democrats' 1992 presidential campaign. Thus begins the most fascinating chapter of her life: her stint as U.S. ambassador to Austria under President Clinton.

During her four years in Vienna, she helped negotiate a ceasefire between warring factions in the Balkans and spear-headed the delivery of humanitarian aid in the region. Meanwhile, her teenage daughter attempted suicide and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Years later, Hunt was able to see the parallels in the concurrent tragedies: "As innocents fled indescribable horrors, I was trying to ward off legions of devils streaming out of our daughter's mind," she writes. "But it was our shared vulnerability that allowed the refugees and me to stretch across language, class and culture—and find each other." Her ability to wield power and yet not lose the common touch is what makes Hunt's memoir so intriguing, and, indeed, what has helped her improve the lives of so many.

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