

OFF THE SHELF

Posted on January 17, 2007

Half-Life of a Zealot

Swanee Hunt. Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 2006

Half-Life of a Zealot, the compelling memoir by Swanee Hunt, the daughter of oil magnate H. L. Hunt, draws the reader in from the first page and refuses to let go.

It's the remarkable story of a woman whose many roles — daughter, sister, wife, mother — informed her journey from a conservative upbringing in a Southern Baptist household to the pinnacle of personal and public accomplishment — as an academic (founding director of the Women and Public Policy Program at the Kennedy School of Government), advocate (chair of the Initiative for Inclusive Security), diplomat (ambassador to Austria during the Clinton administration), philanthropist (president of the Hunt Alternatives Fund), and author (*This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace*, winner of the 2005 PEN Award for nonfiction).

Related Readings

Denitto, Emily. "Rewriting the Third Chapter." *Worth* vol. 15 (October 2006).

Di Mento, Maria; Lewis, Nicole. "How the Wealthy Give: List of Generous Donors in 2005 Includes Some Little-Known Names." *Chronicle of Philanthropy* vol. 18 (23 February 2006).

Murray, Anne Firth. *Paradigm Found: Leading and Managing for Positive Change*. New World Library, 2006.

For more on this topic refer to the [Catalog of Nonprofit Literature](#).

It's also the story of a life lived honestly and with a touch of vulnerability, as the adult Hunt struggles to reconcile her burgeoning public persona with a complex inner life. As Hunt tells it, her family's enormous wealth did not guarantee love, family cohesion, or even acceptance (her efforts to move beyond her father's conservative political and social values, without rejecting her father, are particularly moving). But she persevered and ultimately triumphed.

Along the way, Ms. Hunt limns her family's colorful history with verve and refreshing candor. Her descriptions of the women who influenced her life brim with energy, and the episodes devoted to her marriages and children (especially her daughter's struggle with mental illness) are related with sensitivity and a directness that is irresistible.

This reviewer had the good fortune to hear Ambassador Hunt speak a few years ago and was impressed by her humor, stage presence, and commitment to expanding women's roles and rights in the public policy arena. Ever since, I've been eager to learn more about the woman behind the resume. *Half-Life of a Zealot* doesn't disappoint, and I, for one, look forward to her future accomplishments — and to reading whatever she writes next.

If you haven't had a chance to "meet" Swanee Hunt, let me suggest that, in addition to reading her memoir, you visit the Web site of the [Hunt Alternatives Fund](#), where you

can learn all about "Provoking Change...For Good."

Ruth Dawson



[Half-Life of a Zealot](#)

Swanee Hunt

Best Price \$14.79
or Buy New \$20.67



[Privacy Information](#)



foundationcenter.org

©2007 Foundation Center
All rights reserved.