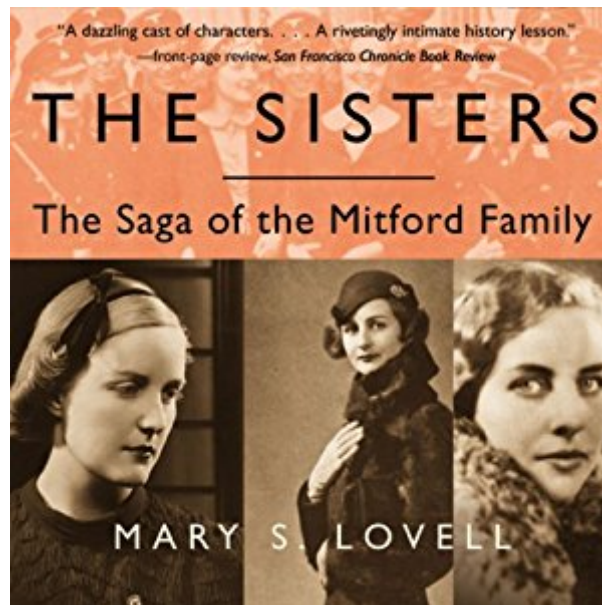


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The Sisters: The Saga Of The Mitford Family



Synopsis

This is the story of a close, loving family splintered by the violent ideologies of Europe between the wars. Jessica was a Communist; Debo became the Duchess of Devonshire; Nancy was one of the best-selling novelists of her day; the ethereally beautiful Diana was the most hated woman in England; and Unity Valkyrie, born in Swastika, Alaska, would become obsessed with Adolf Hitler.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 18 hours and 38 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: May 9, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00CPSDUYI

Best Sellers Rank: #331 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe #333 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Artists, Writers & Musicians #413 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Entertainers & Celebrities

Customer Reviews

The Mitfords - six sisters, their brother and two parents make for fascinating reading and there have been a few biographies, autobiographies and of course the semi-autobiographical novels of Nancy which have managed to fuel the public's desire to hear more. Lovell's biography of the family is more than just the most recent book. It makes use of all the sisters' letters and notes (access hasn't always been allowed in the past - especially to Decca's private papers) and it also helps to shed light on the positives and negatives of all the works which have been published in the Mitford collection. Lovell, whose work I very much admire, has the art of discussing without judging - either her subjects or their previous biographers. I feel she leaves the judgement to the reader to make, and in this case it is a very good thing. The Mitford family had a very controversial set of characters. Nancy with her 'teases' was perhaps the most outrageous within the family, but publically there was the divorce of Diana in the 1930's followed by her seemingly long affair with Moseley (the leader of the British Fascists) and her later marriage and unapologetic support for him and their cause. Unity Mitford is famous, or should I say infamous, for her long friendship with Hitler. Decca ran away from

home with her cousin at the age of about 18 and went to Spain to support the Communists in the Spanish Civil War of 1936. She later married her cousin Esmond and went to live in America where she remained very much cut off from her family - mostly it seems for reasons of her own. The other two sisters, Pamela and Debo led quieter lives and in Debo's case only marginally less interesting. All in all the girls were just fascinating indeed. Lovell starts her book with a brief summary of what isn't going to be in it.

"The Sisters: The Saga of the Mitford Family" tells the (true) story of the Mitford sisters, six beautiful and talented aristocratic young women who came of age in the interwar period. (There was a brother Tom who died during WWII. He does not play a major role in this book nor does it seem in their lives.) These women lived, for the most part, amazing (though not admirable in all cases) lives: Nancy, the oldest, became a best selling novelist; Pamela, the "least interesting" (to the biographer and her family, though not necessarily the reader), lived a country life after a marriage to a brilliant man who married compulsively (six total); Diana, the society beauty, who left her husband for the fascist Oswald Mosley and who befriended Hitler; Unity, who became obsessed with Hitler and met him 140 times during a short period before WWII; Jessica, the rebel, who eloped at 18, became a communist, moved to the states, and became a best selling author on such topics as the funeral home industry; and Deborah, the youngest, who made the most brilliant marriage, to the future Duke of Devonshire. This book details the eccentric but loving childhood of these sisters (though the father had murderous rages that seemed to have a lifelong impact on the children) and the diverse set of political causes and men that both brought them together and drove them apart over the years. Any book that affords the reader glimpses of Churchill as an uncle, Hitler as a "friend", Maya Angelou as an honorary "sister", is worth its price. Lovell presents her material in a straightforward manner. The book is thoroughly researched. However, there are flaws. Lovell could probe further than she does into the psyches of the sisters.

The Mitford clan was the epitome of old English gentry and minor aristocracy. The father of the sisters who are the subject of this book, DAVID MITFORD, 2nd Baron Redesdale, was related to Winston Churchill. Their mother, SYDNEY BOWLES MITFORD, came from a distinguished family. NANCY (1904-1973) was the oldest and became a hugely successful writer of satirical fiction that poked savage fun at her own family and class. PAMELA (1907-1994) was the most "normal" of the lot. She married and divorced a scientist, and was content to live quietly in the country. DIANA (1910-2003) was one of the two most controversial sisters. Beautiful and charming, she was the

muse of several artists in her teens, and married the heir to the Guinness brewing fortune when she was 18. She left him four years and two babies later and ran off with Sir Oswald Mosley, founder of the British Union of Fascists and the most hated man in England. They remained devoted to each other for the rest of their lives, which made her the most hated woman in England. They were imprisoned for more than three years during the war but never wavered in their commitment to both fascism and each other. UNITY VALKYRIE (1914-1948), known as "Boud" or "Bobo" to her sisters, was by far the most controversial sister. A striking Valkyrie-esque beauty, Unity, who was conceived during her parents' sojourn in the unfortunately-named town of Swastika, Canada, lived up to her karma by becoming obsessed with Nazism while in her teens. She managed to meet Hitler and become obsessed with her new friend and proudly wore her Hitler-signed swastika badge everywhere. When England and Germany declared war, she tried to commit suicide, but botched the job, shooting herself in the head but not killing herself.

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