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October 26, 1997

Keeping Score

Doris Kearns Goodwin fondly remembers the 1950's and, especially, the Brooklyn Dodgers.

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By ANN HULBERT

Her father, who inspired in her a passion for the Brooklyn Dodgers, called his daughter Bubbles because she "seemed to enjoy so many things." The butchers in her hometown of Rockville Centre on Long Island called her Ragmop, and fondly taunted the irrepressible fan. (They were Giant loyalists.) Doris Kearns Goodwin, as her disarming memoir shows, was a born mascot -- an endearing emblem of high hopes and undauntable energy. Or rather, like all mascots, she was made, not born, but the role clearly took and stuck. The daddy's girl who so avidly shared in his baseball dreams and in the dramas of her close-knit neighborhood casts herself here as a booster on a larger stage as well: Goodwin recounts an exemplary coming-of-age story from an often maligned era. Born in 1943, just a few years too soon to make the baby boom cutoff, she paints a portrait of feisty girlhood in the prefeminist 1950's.

WAIT TILL NEXT YEAR

A Memoir.

By Doris Kearns Goodwin.

Illustrated. 261 pp. New York:

Simon & Schuster. \$25.

In a season awash in X-rated memoirs, "Wait Till Next Year" is an anomaly: a reminiscence that is suitable, in fact ideal, for a preadolescent readership of not just girls but boys too. Move over, Judy Blume, Matt Christopher and the American Girl doll books. For self-esteem-building female role models, for baseball lore and inning-by-inning action and for a lively trip into the recent American past, you could hardly do better. And Goodwin manages to be refreshingly untherapeutic even as she is being unabashedly didactic about the difficulties of growing up. It's an unusual feat in our Oprah-ized culture, but her trick is simple: she fixates on sports rather than on sex, and she is fascinated more by history than by quirks and crises of personal identity.

Though Goodwin probably didn't have the youth niche in mind for her memoir, it's a strength, not a weakness, of her book that it so readily lends itself to that audience. The essence of her prose, her approach and her appeal is unaffected directness. She allows herself some self-conscious nostalgia for a time when community spirit thrived and "my country" still felt like

an extension of "my family." But Goodwin, who has been a sympathetic biographer of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, the Kennedys and Lyndon Johnson, relies above all on the meticulously exact memory of a well-trained baseball scorekeeper. She isn't peddling any particular ideology, and she displays not a trace of sophisticated, disillusioned irony. She is a fan, whose piles of Dodger scorebooks contain diagrams that help her recapture not just runs, hits and errors but an era.

"Wait Till Next Year" is a revisionist "Memories of a Catholic Girlhood" (Goodwin explicitly alluded to Mary McCarthy's book in a subtitle she later discarded, "Recollections of a 50's Girlhood"). McCarthy cast herself as the rule breaker, the outre intellectual woman who emerged from an eccentric and rebellious past. Growing up a generation later, Goodwin presents herself as the ultimate team player, the girl who joined in all the games during a time when community did not mean conformity -- and when solidarity went hand in hand with self-reliance. As in baseball, everyone worked together knowing that it all came down to the individual in the end. What Roger Angell has written of the game, Goodwin seems to feel about the deceptively neat 50's. "It all looks easy, slow and, above all, safe," Angell said. "Yet we know better, for what is certain in baseball is that someone, perhaps several people, will fail." Or it's certain at any rate that almost every advance has a downside.

This is a 50's success story that is able to acknowledge the strains in the prosperous decade as a fact rather than an indictment of the time. Doris thrived in the privileged position of the late-born youngest daughter in the Kearns family, happily settled in a bustling, heterogeneous neighborhood of not-quite-suburbanites. Every year, the families on the block had more money. As cartons containing television sets arrived in each house, the kids added another stop on their weekly group-viewing schedule: at 5:25 P.M., it was time to gather in the Kearnses' living room for "Howdy Doody."

And Doris could now watch, as well as imagine, every move of her beloved Dodgers, whose rivalry with the Giants and the Yankees kept Rockville Centre happily stirred up. The team "liberated my spirit," and so did the father she adored and who adored her, and who "did not agree that girls should subdue their competitive instincts, or alter their behavior to make themselves attractive to men. He urged me to run for class office, try out for the school plays and speak up in class if I had something to contribute." Even more important, he seized every chance to take her to Ebbets Field. She clung to the ritual, begun when she was 6, of recounting to him the games she followed so intently on the radio while he was at work. (Unaware that newspapers printed box scores, she believed he relied on her for every statistic.)

Goodwin hasn't lost her sportscaster's flair, and she has plenty of I-was-there stories to tell. During the 1951 season, she hurried to an autograph signing and gave Gil Hodges, then in a batting slump, the St. Christopher medal that she'd won in Confirmation class; the saint, she hoped, "would watch over his swing so that he could return home safely each time he went to bat." Hodges's comeback began immediately, and a month later he had hit 17 home runs in 44 games, "three ahead of Babe Ruth's mark." In the summer of what turned out, at last, to be the triumphant season of 1955, Doris finally made contact with her by now aging hero and came away with an autograph she would never trade: "Keep your smile a long, long while. Jackie Robinson."

But just as those promising Dodgers had for years delivered disappointments to their fans, there were shadows all along in the cozy Kearns household and in Rockville Centre, and soon enough there were shake-ups in her "web of familiar places and familiar people." Goodwin expertly paces her tale, ending with the seventh-chapter stretch, when the 15-year-old Doris

has lost her mother, and her grieving father has to move away from the house and the town his daughter loves.

Goodwin dares some sentimentalism because she's prepared the way with realism. Domestic bliss has never reigned; her mother has been very sick from the start. Polio has been a menace. Her best friend, Elaine, has had a difficult adolescence and moved away, and America has hardly been enjoying an idyll of innocence. Goodwin is deftly deadpan in recounting her anxious quest for a bomb shelter big enough to accommodate the whole neighborhood (she found it in the basement of the butcher shop) and her worries about the fate of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg's sons, one of them a baseball fan her age.

She and her friends, primed by the McCarthy hearings, put one another on trial in their living rooms, a game that became ever more "vicious and meanspirited." She was devastated when the Dodgers abandoned Ebbets Field in September 1957. The Little Rock crisis the same month roused urgent discussion in Rockville Centre and in school; a classmate's father, covering the story for The New York Times, was beaten as he helped a tearful child threatened by the angry mob. Sputnik is the rare landmark event about which, Goodwin confesses, she has no eyewitness story. With her boyfriend and a blanket, Doris went out at night to glimpse the satellite and she got distracted.

Baseball, "marked by no clock," has a way of evoking the illusion, Angell has remarked, that "you remain forever young." Dusting off her scorebooks and memories, Goodwin achieves an earnest clarity that can be hard to pull off in maturity, but that speaks well to and of youth. Her book is being marketed to adults, who should make sure that it also finds a place on kids' summer reading lists. Then again, why wait till next year?

Ann Hulbert, the author of "The Interior Castle: The Art and Life of Jean Stafford," is a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.



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Biography Resource Center

Doris Helen Kearns Goodwin

1943-

Also known as: Doris Helen Kearns Goodwin, Doris Helen Kearns, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Doris H. Kearns

Birth: January 4, 1943 in Brooklyn, New York, United States

Nationality: American

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

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"Sidelights"

Since the mid-1960s Doris Kearns Goodwin has distinguished herself as a writer, a journalist, an educator, a television commentator, and a presidential historian. A former professor of government at Harvard University, Goodwin is probably best known to the public as the author of several highly acclaimed biographical and historical books. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* is a political and psychological study of the thirty-sixth president. *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga* examines the life of John F. Kennedy and the two generations that preceded him. *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt--The Home Front in World War II* looks at the difficult and often stormy relationship between Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt during World War II. "I realize," Goodwin told William Goldstein in *Publishers Weekly*, "that to be a historian is to discover the facts in context, to discover what things mean, to lay before the reader your reconstruction of time, place, mood, to empathize even when you disagree. You read all the relevant material, you synthesize all the books, you speak to all the people you can, and then you write down what you know about the period. You feel you own it."

The circumstances surrounding the writing of *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* are somewhat unusual. Goodwin first met President Johnson (often referred to as LBJ) at a White House dance in 1967. At the time she was a White House fellow working as a special assistant to Willard Wirtz. She had recently coauthored an article for the *New Republic* titled "How to Remove LBJ in 1968." The piece was sharply critical of Johnson's foreign policy. Johnson was aware of Goodwin's feelings when he met her but instead of arguing with her, he asked her to dance. At the end of the evening he suggested that she be assigned to work with him in the White House. According to *Nation* contributor Ronnie Dugger, in befriending Goodwin, the president had apparently heeded the advice of John Roche, one of his aides. Roche had told Johnson that having a White House fellow who was critical of the administration would cause him to appear open-minded and unthreatened by the growing anti-war sentiment in America. When Johnson eventually asked Goodwin to help him write his memoirs, she agreed; after his retirement she traveled to the Johnson ranch in Austin, Texas, on weekends, holidays, and vacations to help Johnson write the "official" version of his presidency.

Johnson's choice of Goodwin as his biographer was one many observers found noteworthy. In addition to being critical of his administration, she was, as the author David Halberstam noted in the *New York Times Book Review*, highly "respected in the Eastern intellectual world which Johnson was sure despised him." With Goodwin (as one of their own) telling his story, he believed that the group he felt excluded from would finally, if not accept him, then at least listen to his story. He had, as a writer for the *New Yorker* put it, become "preoccupied with the verdict of history." He wanted to be remembered as a successful

president, and he sought out writers who would be friendly in their judgment of him.

Published in 1976, three years after Johnson's death, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* found favor with reviewers. Halberstam called the book "a fascinating and unusual addition to the Johnson shelf." Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, writing in the *New York Times*, deemed it "the most penetrating, fascinating political biography I have ever read." In his *Washington Post Book World* review, Horace Busby commented on the quality of Goodwin's writing, describe her prose as "vivid and sensitive" and her portrait of the ex-president "the most fascinating and absorbing and, yes, sympathetic to appear in contemporary literature."

In *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, Goodwin does more than recount the details of Johnson's personal life and political career; she also offers a probing study of the former president's personality, examining in particular how his early years were integral in making him the politician he became. As Goodwin sees it, Johnson's political ambitions, his quest for power, and his plans for the "Great Society" all stemmed from an effort to free himself from the conflict he felt torn by from birth. His mother was shy, genteel, and dignified; his father was easy-going, flamboyant, and frequently ill-mannered. As the author Larry McMurtry explained in *Saturday Review*, Goodwin "demonstrates again and again how Johnson's youthful need to keep the peace between his parents affected his style as a politician, a style dependent upon endless and often very subtle personal negotiation." This psychobiographical approach drew quite a bit of critical attention, much of it positive. In a review for *Newsweek*, Paul D. Zimmerman praised Goodwin for "producing a sensible, scrupulous compassionate study of the connections between Lyndon Johnson's psychological drives and his political fortunes." He added: "Other books, pitched at a greater distance from their subject, will undoubtedly offer a more definitive social and political appraisal of the Johnson Presidency. But none is likely to offer a sharper, more intimate portrait of Lyndon Johnson in full psychic undress." McMurtry wrote that "the effort she has made to untangle the psychic knots of his character and relate them to his actions as a leader is ... extremely loyal, requiring much empathy and a long application of effort and intelligence."

One of the more controversial aspects of the book was Goodwin's analysis of Johnson's dreams; several critics wondered about the validity of these interpretations. "She seems," wrote *New York Review of Books* contributor Gary Wills, "insufficiently aware of the fact that dreams told in a persuasive context cannot have the evidentiary value of those discussed in analysis." McMurtry, on the other hand, claimed that Goodwin "makes a tentative, fair, never very dogmatic use of the tools of psychoanalysis." James M. Perry wrote in the *National Observer* that although Goodwin presents "some pretty heavy character analysis amounting to psychohistory" in her book, "she is honest enough to admit that there are vast empty spaces in what we know about the human mind and human behavior."

Six months after *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* was published, Simon & Schuster contracted Goodwin to write a biography of Johnson's predecessor, John F. Kennedy. Goodwin began work in late 1977 but what she initially envisioned as a three-year project on Kennedy's life evolved into a multi-generational saga of two Irish-American families. Divided into three parts and spanning nearly a century, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* chronicles three generations of Fitzgeralds and Kennedys--from the baptism of John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald in 1863 to the inauguration of his grandson and namesake John F. Kennedy as U.S. president in 1961. Although quite a few books have been written about the Kennedys, Goodwin was able to add fresh material to her work as a result of her access to two valuable sources. One of these was her husband, Richard, a former speechwriter for and advisor to Lyndon Johnson and Robert and John Kennedy. Having known the Kennedys for over twenty-five years Richard Goodwin was able to provide his wife with an insider's view of the family. Through her husband's close ties to the Kennedys, Goodwin also came upon a mine of information untapped by previous biographers--one hundred and fifty cartons of Joseph Kennedy's personal correspondence. These letters not only permitted Goodwin to fill in important details concerning Joseph's business dealings, they also allowed her to gain insight into his relationships with his wife and children. In addition, Goodwin was able to use the contents of these letters to stimulate the latent memories of Joseph's wife, Rose. In doing so she was able to dispel certain notions about John and his father as well as offer new perspectives on existing knowledge about other family members.

Critical reaction to *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* was enthusiastic, with many critics praising Goodwin's treatment of what has become a rather well-traversed subject. In a review for the *New York Times*, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt wrote: "The story is familiar enough. We've read its various parts in at least a dozen books over the past quarter century." The reviewer went on: "Yet rarely has this familiar saga seemed so fresh and dramatic. Rarely have its characters been so alive and individual. Rarely has popular history rung so authentic, or, conversely, fresh scholarship struck us as so captivating." Similarly, *Los Angeles Times* contributor Robert Dallek noted in his review: "Doris Kearns Goodwin's new study is now the best book on the subject." Again, Goodwin's writing style met with acclaim. *Washington Post* contributor George V. Higgins called *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* "an anecdotal, thoughtful genealogy" and deemed Goodwin "a meticulous and felicitous writer." Historian Geoffrey C. Ward, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, described Goodwin's portrayal of the book's main characters as "remarkably rich and fully rounded," adding: "Her accounts of the events through which they all lived [are] unusually complex and elegantly rendered." In his *New York Times* review Lehmann-Haupt commented on the tri-generational approach the author employs in *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, deeming it "deceptively simple," and commended Goodwin on the book's attention to detail and "thematic coherence."

Many critics were aware of Goodwin's close personal and political ties to the Kennedy family, and a good number admired her ability to write *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* objectively, or as Dallek put it, "with compassion and understanding." Higgins acknowledged that Goodwin "deftly elid[ed] the problem implicit in the fact that her husband, Richard Goodwin, has been a Kennedy confidant for about three decades--while employing the advantage of that relationship." Higgins further noted: "I think she dealt brilliantly with the potential problem. She has ended her chronicle at JFK's inauguration, in 1961. While I think a stranger to the living family might have employed harsher rhetoric to deliver the moral and ethical estimates she renders, her verdicts are--though mercifully couched--just, complete and unsparing." Lehmann-Haupt commented: "Mrs. Goodwin pulls no punches when it comes to the faults and frailties of the Fitzgerald and Kennedy families because [she] examines their characters so intelligently. ... Because she places them all in the broader sweep of history, she never appears to be debunking her subjects." The reviewer concluded: "In short, the legend remains intact in both its triumphant and tragic aspects."

In 1995 Goodwin received the Pulitzer Prize in biography for her third book, *No Ordinary Time*. The book's strong points and the "glowing reviews" it received, according to *Chicago Tribune* reporter Barbara B. Buchholz, "are in large part due to Goodwin's ability to bring to life complex personal relationships." These relationships include Franklin Roosevelt's "friendships with the women in his life: Lucy Mercer Rutherford (the woman who almost broke up the Roosevelt marriage in 1918), Marguerite (Missy) LeHand (his secretary and companion for over 20 years) and Princess Martha of Norway," explained Blanche Wiesen Cook in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. For her part, stated *New Republic* reviewer Joe Klein, Eleanor Roosevelt "hir[ed] close friends--the actor Melvyn Douglas and the dancer Mayris Chaney, among others--as public morale boosters" in her brief stint as assistant director of the Office of Civil Defense. She also carried on close--Goodwin does *not* say intimate--relationships with Associated Press reporter Lorena Hickock, her secretary Malvina "Tommy" Thompson, and social activist Joseph Lash. However, Keith Henderson of the *Christian Science Monitor* emphasized that "the central relationship between the wartime president and his irreplaceable wife drives the book."

"*No Ordinary Time* is no ordinary book," declared David M. Kennedy in a piece for the *New York Times Book Review*. Besides being one of the few biographies to present a joint picture of the presidential couple during the war years, it also shows a unique picture of the two working together as a political, if not a romantic, team. "To Goodwin, though such a partnership made good political sense," noted James Bowman in the *Washington Post Book World*, "it was founded upon an essential truth about the partners' respective natures. Eleanor, the daughter of a neglectful mother and a loving but alcoholic father, never felt at home in a domestic role--partly because Franklin's mother, on whom he was emotionally dependent, prevented her from being mistress in her own house." For his part, Franklin was deeply sensitive about his paraplegia and dreamed about the days before he was stricken with polio, when he could walk alone and unassisted. "It is a measure of Doris Kearns Goodwin's success," asserted Klein in his review, "that the subtle sources of FDR's greatness become manifest in the course of this book."

Despite their effective partnership, Goodwin depicts both Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt as alienated from each other. "In the final pages of this book, Franklin, broken in health and isolated, appears unspeakably lonely. So too does Eleanor," wrote Kennedy, adding: "She still loved Franklin, Ms. Goodwin insists, but could no longer touch his soul nor be touched by his." "In weaving together private and public contexts," concluded *Tribune Books* reviewer Linda Simon, "Goodwin shows that history is not a chronicle of major events but the cumulative, quirky responses of idiosyncratic human beings to the demands and challenges of their time."

Goodwin looks farther back in history for her book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. "I thought, at first, that I would focus on Abraham Lincoln and Mary as I did on Franklin and Eleanor; but, I found that during the war, Lincoln was married more to the colleagues in his cabinet--in terms of time he spent with them and the emotion shared--than he was to Mary," Goodwin said of her approach to the book in an interview on the *Bookreporter.com* Web site.

Team of Rivals focuses primarily on Lincoln and the relationship he had with three men who were his political opponents for the presidency but whom he nevertheless appointed to his cabinet once elected. They were William H. Seward (Secretary of State), Edward Bates (Attorney General), and Salmon P. Chase (Secretary of the Treasury). In addition to describing how these men actually bolstered Lincoln's ability to govern despite their differences with him, Goodwin also examines the four men's wives and the large role that they played in influencing their husbands' political beliefs. "Goodwin's narrative gifts ... are used to good effect," wrote Ronald C. White, Jr., in *Books & Culture*, further noting: "In exquisite detail Goodwin allows us to listen in on the gossip and political deals in backroom meetings, Kate Chase's parties, and Mary Todd Lincoln's state dinners. ... [The author] gives us the private Lincoln, the president at ease, engaged in conversation in Seward's home across the street from the White House, with his feet up in front of the fireplace." Writing in the *National Review*, Arthur Herman concluded that "Goodwin's fine book makes an important contribution to our national understanding of this crucial era."

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born January 4, 1943, in Brooklyn, NY; daughter of Michael Alouisius (a bank examiner) and Helen Witt Kearns; married Richard Goodwin (a writer and political consultant), 1975; children: Richard, Michael, Joseph. **Education:** Colby College, B.A. (magna cum laude); Harvard University, Ph.D., 1968. **Religion:** Roman Catholic. **Memberships:** American Political Science

Association, Council on Foreign Relations (member of nominating and reform committees, 1972), Women Involved (chair and member of board of advisers), Group for Applied Psychoanalysis, Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Sigma Iota, Signet Society. **Addresses:** Home: Concord, MA. Agent: Beth Laski & Associates, 12930 Ventura Blvd., Ste. 513, Studio City, CA 91604.

AWARDS

Fulbright fellow, 1966; Outstanding Young Woman of the Year award from Phi Beta Kappa, 1966; White House fellow, 1967; Woodrow Wilson fellow; Pulitzer Prize, 1995, for *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt--The Home Front in World War II*; Charles Frankel Prize, National Endowment for the Humanities; Sara Josepha Hale medal; Lincoln Prize for an outstanding work about the president and/or the American Civil War, and National Book Critics Circle Award nomination, both 2006, both for *Team of Rivals*.

CAREER

U.S. Government, Washington, DC, State Department intern, 1963, House of Representatives intern, 1965, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, research associate, 1966, Department of Labor, special assistant to Willard Wirtz, 1967, special assistant to President Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1968. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, assistant professor, 1969- 71, associate professor of government, beginning 1972, assistant director of Institute of Politics, beginning 1971, member of faculty council. Special consultant to President Johnson, 1969-73. Host of television show *What's the Big Idea?*, WGBH-TV, Boston, MA, 1972; political analyst for news desk, WBZ-TV, Boston. Member of Democratic party platform committee, 1972; member of Women's Political Caucus in Massachusetts (member of steering committee, beginning 1972); National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), news analyst. Trustee of Wesleyan University, Colby College, and Robert F. Kennedy Foundation; Pulitzer Prize board member, resigned in 2002.

WRITINGS:

- (Under name Doris Helen Kearns) *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, Harper (New York, NY), 1976, published under name Doris Kearns Goodwin with a new foreword by the author, St. Martin's (New York, NY), 1991.
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Author of introduction to *The Johnson Presidential Press Conferences*, E.M. Coleman Enterprises (New York, NY), 1978; author of foreword to *Kennedy Weddings: A Family Album*, by Jay Mulvaney, St. Martin's (New York, NY), 1999; contributor to *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art*, edited by Marc Pachter, New Republic Books, 1979; contributor of articles on politics and baseball to periodicals, including the *New Republic*, *New York Times*, *Atlantic*, *Life*, *Redbook*, *Lears*, and *TV Guide*.

MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. purchased the television rights to *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga*; works adapted as audiobooks include *Wait till Next Year: A Memoir*, Simon & Schuster Audio (New York, NY), 1997, and *Team of Rivals*, Simon & Schuster Audio (New York, NY), 2006.

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Memoir Discussion Questions (Generic)

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1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not?
2. What do you think motivated the author to share his or her life story? How did you respond to the author's "voice"?
3. Do you think the author is trying to elicit a certain response from the reader, such as sympathy? How has this book changed or enhanced your view of the author?
4. Discuss the book's structure and the author's use of language and writing style. How does the author draw the reader in and keep the reader engaged? Does the author convey his or her story with comedy, self-pity, or something else?
5. Were there any instances in which you felt the author was not being truthful? How did you react to these sections?
6. What is the author's most admirable quality? Is this someone you would want to know or have known?
7. Compare this book to other memoirs your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?
8. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read more works by this author?



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Suggested Book Discussion Questions - Wait Till Next Year

A. These discussion questions are provided by Lee Fertitta, Librarian and Book Discussion Leader, Port Washington Public Library:

1. Besides her father, what motivates young Doris toward baseball?
2. How does keeping score prepare her for her later career as a historian?
3. Is her story a "typical" one of childhood? How different or alike was your childhood?
4. Her own story seems almost sugar-coated, at least compared to the histories she has written about others. Would your "story" be as sweet? Share something from your history.
5. Doris had an active imagination as a child – she made up stories based on events going on around her, like imagining that her first love, Johnny, developed polio and was therefore unable to return to the beach. Storytelling helps create memory. Did you have a storyteller in your youth?
6. What dark clouds penetrated her childhood and how did she react to them?
7. Jackie Robinson was her favorite player. What do you think drew her to him?
8. Old Mary reminded me of Boo Radley in "To Kill a Mockingbird." What other characters can you think of that seem threatening when the reality is something different? What is the significance of this story to Doris' childhood?
9. Her Catholic faith, as interpreted in her youth, leads her to spend some sleepless nights and an effort to "make things right." What did she learn from her attempt to "redeem" herself?
10. Doris talks about her school lessons, and how she learned the "melting pot" theory of assimilation in America, only to find out how simplistic and inaccurate it was. Discuss the influence of our childhood education on our lives and values.
11. When visiting Roosevelt's Hyde Park house for an assignment, Doris makes a connection between imagining history and visualizing baseball games. What other "epiphanies" does she relate in her memoir?
12. Discuss the Rosenberg story in light of the recent admission of guilt from David Greenglass.
13. Playing their McCarthy game led the neighborhood children to accusations and recriminations, just like on TV. What lesson did they take from that?
14. In retrospect, the 1950s appear to be an uneventful period in history, but many changes in cultural and political habits were in fact brewing. What were some of the issues Doris talks about and how different (or similar) are they to what you remember or have understood?