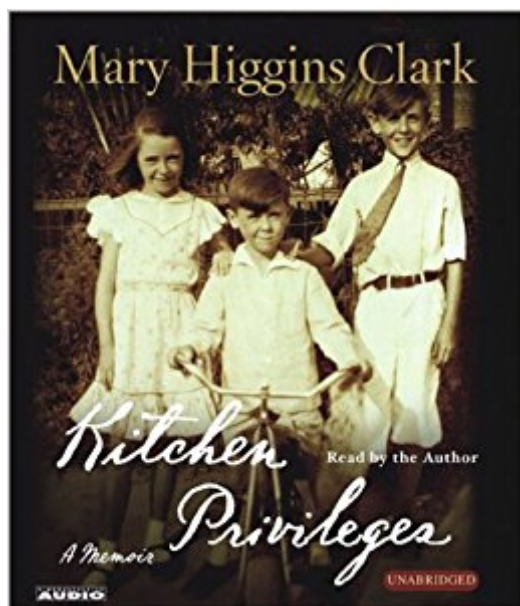


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Kitchen Privileges: Memoirs Of A Bronx Girlhood



Synopsis

Even as a young girl, growing up in the Bronx, Mary Higgins Clark knew she wanted to be a writer. The gift of storytelling was a part of her Irish ancestry, so it followed naturally that she would later use her sharp eye, keen intelligence, and inquisitive nature to create stories. Along with all Americans, citizens of the Bronx suffered during the Depression. So when Mary's father died, her mother opened the family home to boarders and placed a discreet sign next to the front door that read, "Furnished Rooms. Kitchen Privileges." The family's struggle to make ends meet; her days as a scholarship student in an exclusive girls academy; the death of her beloved older brother in World War II; her marriage to Warren Clark; writing stories at the kitchen table; finally selling the first one for one hundred dollars, after six years and forty rejections -- all these experiences figure into Kitchen Privileges. Her husband's untimely death left her a widowed mother of five young children. Determined to care for her family and to make a career for herself, she wrote scripts for a radio show. In her spare time she began writing novels. *Where Are The Children?* became an international bestseller and launched her career. When asked if she might consider giving up writing for a life of leisure, Mary has replied, "Never. To be happy for a year, win the lottery. To be happy for life, do what you love."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mary Higgins Clark is the author of twenty-seven worldwide bestsellers. She lives with her husband, John Conheeny, in Saddle River, New Jersey.

Chapter One My first conscious memory is of being three years old and looking down at my new baby brother with a mixture of curiosity and distress. His crib had not been delivered on time, and he was sleeping in my doll carriage, thereby displacing my favorite doll, who was ready for her nap. Luke and Nora, my father and mother, had kept company for seven years, a typical Irish courtship. He was forty-two and she pushing forty when they finally tied the knot. They had Joseph within the year; me, Mary, nineteen months later; and Mother celebrated her forty-fifth birthday by giving birth to Johnny. The story is that when the doctor went into her room, saw the newborn in her arms and the rosary entwined in her fingers, he observed, "I assume this one is Jesus." Since we weren't Hispanic, in which culture Jesus is a common name, John, the first cousin of the Holy Family, was the closest Mother could get. Later when we were all in St. Francis Xavier School and instructed to write J.M.J., which stood for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, on the top of our test papers, I thought it was a tribute to Joe and me and Johnny. The year 1931, when Johnny made his appearance, was a good one in our modest world. My father's Irish pub was flourishing. In anticipation of the new arrival, my parents had purchased a home in the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx. At that time more rural than suburban, it was only two streets away from Angelina's farm. Angelina, a wizened elderly lady, would show up every afternoon on the street outside our house, pushing a cart with fresh fruit and vegetables. "God blessa your momma, your poppa, tella them I gotta lotsa nicea stringabeans today," she would say. Our house, 1913 Tenbroeck Avenue, was a semidetached six-room brick-and-stucco structure with a second half bath in a particularly chilly section of the basement. My mother's joy in having her own home was only slightly lessened by the fact that she and my father had paid ten thousand five for it, while Anne and Charlie Potters, who bought the other side, had only paid ten thousand dollars for the identical space. "It's because your father has his own business, and we were driving an expensive new car," she lamented. But the expensive new car, a Nash, had sprung an oil leak as they drove it out of the showroom. "It was the beginning of our luck going sour," she would later reminisce. The Depression had set in with grim reality. I remember as a small child regularly watching Mother answering the door to find a man standing there, his clothes clean but frayed, his manner courteous. He was looking for work, any kind of work. Did anything need repairing or painting? And if not, could we possibly help him out with a cup of coffee, and maybe something to eat. Mother never turned away anyone. She left a card table in the foyer and would willingly fix a meal for the unexpected guest. Juice, coffee, a soft-boiled egg and toast in the morning, sandwiches and tea for lunch. I don't remember anyone ringing the bell after midafternoon. By then, God help them, they were probably on their way home, if they had a home to go to, with the disheartening news that there was no work to be had. I loved our house

and our neighborhood. Mine was the little room, its window over the front door. I would wake in the morning to the clipclop of the horses pulling the milk and bread wagons. Borden's milk. Dugan's bread and cake. Sights that have passed into oblivion as surely as the patient horses and creaking wagons that teased me awake and comforted me with their familiarity all those years ago. A box was in permanent residence on the front steps of our house to hold the milk bottles. In the winter, I used to gauge the temperature by checking to see if the cream at the top of the bottles had frozen, forcing the cardboard lids to rise. During the summer, in midafternoon, we'd all be alert for the sound of jingling bells that meant that Eddy, the Good Humor Man, was wheeling his heavy bicycle around the corner. Looking back, I realize he couldn't have been more than in his early thirties. With a genuine smile and the patience of Job, he waited while the kids gathered around him, agonizing over their choice of flavor. All of us had the same routine: a nickle on weekdays for a Dixie cup; a dime on Sunday for a Good Humor on a stick. That was the hardest day for making up my mind. I loved burnt almond over vanilla ice cream. On the other hand, I also loved chocolate over chocolate. Once the choice had been made, the trick for Joe and John and me was to see who could make the ice cream last the longest so that the other guys' tongues would be hanging out as they watched the winner enjoy those final licks. The problem was that on hot Sundays the ice cream melted faster, and it wasn't unusual for the one who made it last the longest to see half the Good Humor slide off the stick and land on the ground. Then the howls of anguish from the afflicted delighted the other two, who now had the satisfaction of chanting, "Ha, ha. Thought you were so smart." Eddy the Good Humor Man had lost the thumb and index finger of his left hand up to the knuckle. He explained that there had been something wrong with the spring of the heavy refrigerator lid, and it had smashed down on those fingers. "But it was a good accident," he explained. "The company gave me forty-two dollars, and I was able to buy a winter coat for my wife. She really needed one." The Depression didn't really hit our family until I was in the third or fourth grade. We had a cleaning woman, German Mary, whom we called "Lally" because she would come up the block singing, "Lalalalaaaaa." Years later, she became the model for Lally in my second book, *A Stranger Is Watching*. Back then, she was the first perk to go. We always had two copies of the Times delivered each day. One copy was saved, and I delivered it to the convent on my way to school the next morning. In those days the nuns were not allowed to read the current day's paper. But as times got increasingly tough, they were out of luck. Mother had to cancel the delivery of both papers. I guess when you think about it, the delivery guy was out of luck, too. I wrote my first poem when I was six. I still have it because Mother saved everything I wrote. She also insisted that I recite everything I wrote for the benefit of anyone who happened to be visiting. Since she had four sisters

and many cousins, all of whom visited frequently, I am sure there must have been regular if silent groans when she would announce, "Mary has written a lovely new poem today. She has promised to recite it for us. Mary, stand on the landing and recite your lovely new poem."When I was finished thrilling everyone with my latest gem, my mother led the applause. "Mary is very gifted," she would announce. "Mary is going to be a successful writer when she grows up."Looking back, I am sure that the captive audience was ready to strangle me, but I am intensely grateful for that early vote of absolute confidence I received. When I started sending out short stories and getting them back by return mail, I never got discouraged. Mother's voice always rang in my subconscious. Someday I was going to be a successful writer. I was going to make it. That's why, if I may, I'd like to direct a few words to parents and teachers: When a child comes to you wanting to share something he or she has written or sketched, be generous with your praise. If it's a written piece, don't talk about the spelling or the penmanship; look for the creativity and applaud it. The flame of inspiration needs to be encouraged. Put a glass around that small candle and protect it from discouragement or ridicule. I also started writing skits, which I bullied Joe and John into performing with me. I served as writer, director, producer, and star. I remember Johnny's plaintive request, "Can't I ever be the star?" "No, I wrote it," I explained. "When you write it, you get to be the star."Mother's unmarried sisters, May and Agnes, were our most frequent visitors and therefore the longest suffering witnesses to my developing talent. May was eleven months older than Mother and, like her, had been a buyer in a Fifth Avenue department store. Ag, the second youngest in the family, fell in love at twenty-four with Bill Barrett, a good-looking, affable detective, fourteen years her senior. There was one fly in the ointment: old Mrs. Barrett, Bill's mother, who spent most of her life with her feet on the couch, had begged Bill not to marry until God called her. She was sure her death was imminent and wanted him under her roo... --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Loved it! I had read it years ago and now got it for a friend. Very inspirational to anyone who wants to be a writer.

I bought this for my teenage niece. She has worn out the cassette tapes of this book. She has some learning disabilities and this book seems to lessen the stress for her after a hard day at school.

In *Kitchen Privileges*, suspense writer Mary Higgins Clark writes about her formative years and the first half of her adult life. She does through through a series of vignettes and stories, showing the places, people and experiences that influenced her. Her tone is honest, but modest, and often funny.

Sometimes it assumes the tone of someone recollecting their favorite scenes from life, scenes which have a lot of meaning to the teller, but not so much to the listener. But Clark's spirit dances throughout the memoir, a spirit that gave her the persistence to continue writing despite years of rejections, to write, work and raise five children, to pursue her interests and values in an era where women were not given much freedom, and to continue to find joy even after the deaths of her parents, husband, brother-in-law, and all siblings. The audio CDs are read by Clark herself, making her story very personal. *Kitchen Privileges* is worthwhile listening (or reading) for Clark fans or for those interested in a woman's life in mid-twentieth century America. For younger listeners, it's an interesting personal account of an era so different from today.

A surprising glimpse into the world of Mary Higgins Clark from her childhood which took a sad turn with the early death of her father. Her mother then was forced to rent out rooms (with kitchen privileges) in order to try to make ends meet. Some of their tenants were interesting to say the least. Before marrying, Ms. Clark was an airline stewardess and she has a few interesting stories about that. She married the man she had had a crush on and was blissfully happy until he suffered a fatal heart attack leaving her with 5 children. She writes about her struggles to become published and also of her fantastic life since. The only thing wrong with the book is that it is so brief. Like I said at the beginning, we only get a glimpse into the life of this fascinating woman.

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