

THE
MAGNIFICENT
LIVES OF
MARJORIE
POST

Book Club Kit



ALLISON
PATAKI



DEAR READER,

I am so excited to share *The Magnificent Lives of Marjorie Post* with you. And thank you for taking the time to read it! The story of Marjorie Merriweather Post gripped me from the very start, as hers is the sort of epic life story that shaped history and changed the world. In many ways, the twists and turns of her inspiring life seem so grandiose and dramatic that it all feels too good to be true as the raw material for an historical novel—except that it is true, so that made it all the more fun.

As both a reader and a writer, I love uncovering the stories of fascinating and significant women who made a meaningful mark in history, and Marjorie was an icon and a trailblazer. *The Magnificent Lives of Marjorie Post* is my ninth book, and yet it feels particularly exciting and personal because I fell in love with the historical material, the time periods covered and, yes, the subject herself while researching and writing this novel.

“I can’t count all the things that she has done for this city. . . . I’d take the odds she can’t even remember them.” Thus spoke reporter Roy Meacham of Marjorie Merriweather Post during a 1966 radio broadcast. While Meacham was referring primarily to Post’s philanthropic work as it related to her then-hometown of Washington, D.C., I was so struck when I encountered this quotation because the statement hit on the very sentiment that I myself had felt many times over while researching and then writing about Marjorie Merriweather Post and her extraordinary life. She did *that*? She lived through *that*? She met *him*? She befriended *her*? She was *there*? She built *that*? Marjorie Merriweather Post lived her long life to the fullest; hers was a grand and epic story from start to finish, and it is my great fortune to write fiction inspired by her.

As a lifelong lover of books and book clubs, I know very well the power a well-placed story has to transport, inspire, and educate—while also entertaining. I hope that this book will do that for you, for the members of your reading group, and for all of its readers. I’m humbled and thankful that my book now has the opportunity to be a part of your reading journey.

With best wishes for happy reading!

Warmly,
Allison



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your first impression of Marjorie Merriweather Post? How did that impression change throughout the course of the novel? How did Marjorie change during her lifetime?

2. Marjorie Post had many roles in life: daughter, wife and mother, businesswoman, philanthropist, press target, press darling, hostess, collector, diplomat, style icon, etc. Which was your favorite side of her? Which do you think meant the most to her?

3. A wife four times over, Marjorie sought her happily-ever-after with four radically different men. How did each marriage shape her identity? In the end, do you think she found her ultimate happily-ever-after?

4. Love, family, and feminism are all major themes in the novel. What other overarching ideas did you notice? What did you take away from reading the book overall?

5. Had you heard of Marjorie Post before? What did you learn about her historical significance from this book? Are there ways you think Marjorie's legacy has shaped your life today?

6. *Marjorie Post* is written from a first-person point of view. Did that help you connect to Marjorie as a character? How might the book be different if written from a different perspective?

7. In her note at the back of the book, Allison Pataki says that her job as a writer of historical fiction is to “gather up and absorb many different details and facts and then attempt to get at the emotional truths that reside therein.” What emotional truths did you experience while reading?

8. What other great women in history did Marjorie remind you of?

9. Pataki writes that Marjorie's was, “A life made ever richer by curiosity and generosity. A life in which I spent gladly of the riches of my heart. A life that has been a truly beautiful thing.” (p. 531) What does living life to the fullest mean to you?

10. How does *The Magnificent Lives of Marjorie Post* compare to Pataki's other historical fiction, such as *The Queen's Fortune* or *Sisi*?



THE LIFE OF MARJORIE MERRIWEATHER POST: FUN FACTS

1. Marjorie Merriweather Post's company changed the American lifestyle and diet in fundamental ways, beginning with introducing the concept of a quick and ready-made breakfast called cereal, which primarily saved housewives from the hours of effort required to cook eggs, oatmeal, bacon, and other hot breakfast foods daily over a fire. After the Posts revolutionized the concept of breakfast, they went on to alter Americans' concepts of lunch, dinner, beverages, dessert, and refrigeration. Their company would grow to include such household names as Log Cabin, Birdseye Frozen Foods, Jell-O, Maxwell House Coffee, Post Cereals, Tang, Hostess, and many other brands.

2. When Marjorie Merriweather Post first suggested acquiring the Birdseye Frozen Foods company, advisers scoffed at her because they did not believe that grocers and homeowners across the United States would want to be troubled with having to purchase and keep refrigerators and freezers.

3. Her beloved yacht, the *Sea Cloud*, made its way into the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's largest privately owned yacht, surpassing the luxury vessels owned by magnates J.P. Morgan, Harold Vanderbilt, and others.

4. Marjorie Merriweather Post completed work on her Palm Beach "cottage," which she named Mar-a-Lago, in 1927, and dreamed of someday leaving the home to the United States government to be enjoyed as a winter White House.

5. She numbered among her close friends Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy—as well as world leaders Winston Churchill, King Leopold III of Belgium, King George V and Queen Mary of England—and many other notable figures.

6. She served as the first U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union during the 1930s, mingling with such Russian figures as Vyacheslav Molotov and Maxim Litvinov. While stationed in Moscow, Marjorie became one of the largest collectors of imperial Russian treasure in the world. Her vast art collection is available to the public today at her former home, Hillwood Estate, in Washington, D.C.

7. She had three daughters, the youngest of whom was actress Dina Merrill.

8. She owned jewelry and art from Tsarina Catherine the Great of Russia, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, Marie Antoinette of France, and many other royal and imperial figures.

9. Marjorie Merriweather Post was not only one of the wealthiest individuals in the United States of America, she was also the first woman to serve on the corporate board of directors of General Foods. She was a trailblazer for women in business and society along with her friends and peers Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins.

10. Though Marjorie Merriweather Post married four times, dashing financier E.F. Hutton was purported to be the great love of her life. During their tenure on Long Island's Gold Coast and Manhattan during the Jazz Age, the Huttons mingled with celebrities including Florenz Ziegfeld Jr., Billie Burke, Wallis Simpson, and many other celebrities. It is part of their legend that the Huttons may have provided part of the inspiration for F. Scott Fitzgerald's characters of Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan.