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by Valerie Biden Owens · Language: EN

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Overview

Valerie Biden Owens's memoir, "Growing Up Biden," offers an intimate and personal account of her life as the younger sister and closest confidante of President Joe Biden. The book chronicles her journey from a close-knit Irish Catholic family in Scranton, Pennsylvania, through the triumphs and tragedies that shaped the Biden family, and her unique role as a political advisor and campaign manager for her brother throughout his decades-long career. Owens provides a rare, behind-the-scenes look at the human side of politics, emphasizing the unwavering family loyalty and resilience that have been hallmarks of the Bidens.

Owens delves into her childhood, highlighting the foundational values instilled by her parents and the exceptionally strong bond she shares with Joe. She recounts the devastating losses the family endured, including the car accident that killed Joe's first wife and infant daughter, and later, the death of his son Beau, illustrating how these profound sorrows were met with collective strength and a commitment to moving forward. Beyond her brother's political narrative, Owens also shares her own experiences as a woman navigating a demanding professional life, raising a family, and maintaining her personal identity while deeply involved in the public sphere. The book ultimately serves as a testament to the power of family, faith, and perseverance in the face of adversity, offering insights into the personal journey behind a public figure.

Key Takeaways

- Family loyalty and unwavering support are crucial foundations for navigating life's challenges and public service.
- Resilience is built through confronting and processing profound grief and tragedy together as a unit.
- Women can play powerful, often understated, roles in shaping political careers and public life while balancing personal aspirations.
- Maintaining a strong sense of self and personal values is essential, even when deeply intertwined with a public figure's journey.
- The values instilled in childhood—hard work, empathy, and perseverance—often dictate one's path and response to adversity.

• True leadership often emerges from a deep understanding of people and a commitment to service, rooted in personal experience.

• It is possible to be deeply involved in politics without losing sight of the human element and the importance of personal connections.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: The Beginning

Valerie Biden Owens introduces her family's roots, starting with their Irish Catholic heritage in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and later their move to Claymont, Delaware. She describes her parents, Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden and Joseph Robinette Biden Sr., as the foundational figures who instilled strong values of hard work, resilience, and family loyalty. The chapter emphasizes the close-knit bond among the Biden siblings—Joe, Valerie, Frank, and Jimmy—and the importance of their shared experiences, including their parents' struggles and triumphs. Valerie highlights the early lessons learned about perseverance and the power of family support, setting the stage for understanding the deep connections that would define their lives and Joe's political career.

Chapter 2: The Boys of Summer

This chapter focuses on Joe Biden's early life and formative years, particularly his struggles with a stutter and his determined efforts to overcome it. Valerie recounts how Joe's speech impediment shaped his character, fostering empathy and a fierce resolve. She describes their childhood in Delaware, filled with sports, particularly football, and the competitive yet supportive dynamic between Joe and his siblings. Valerie details Joe's leadership qualities emerging even in youth, his protective nature towards his younger siblings, and the unwavering belief their parents had in his potential. The chapter paints a vivid picture of a typical American boyhood, underscored by the unique challenges and strengths that would later define a future president.

Chapter 3: The Girl Who Would Be King

Valerie shifts the focus to her own childhood and identity within the Biden family. She describes herself as a tomboy, often participating in sports and activities traditionally associated with boys, and recounts her early aspirations and independent spirit. The chapter explores her unique position as the only sister among three brothers, highlighting the dynamics of sibling relationships and how she carved out her own space. Valerie shares anecdotes that illustrate her strong will and her parents' encouragement of her ambitions, emphasizing that she was never limited by gender expectations. This chapter provides insight into Valerie's personal development and the origins of her own strength and determination, which would later serve her in her professional and political roles.

Chapter 4: The Best Laid Plans

This chapter covers Joe Biden's college years at the University of Delaware and Syracuse Law School, and his burgeoning romance with Neilia Hunter. Valerie recounts the family's move to Delaware and how Joe met Neilia, describing their immediate connection and the deep love that developed between them. She shares details of their wedding and the early years of their marriage, including the births of their sons, Beau and Hunter. The chapter portrays a period of optimism and growth for Joe, as he began his legal career and started a family, laying the groundwork for his future in public service. Valerie emphasizes the joy and promise of these years before the unforeseen tragedy that would later strike the family.

Chapter 5: The Campaign

Valerie details the pivotal 1972 Senate campaign, where Joe Biden, at just 29 years old, decided to challenge incumbent J. Caleb Boggs. She recounts her crucial role as Joe's campaign manager, despite her lack of prior political experience. The chapter describes the grassroots nature of the campaign, relying heavily on family and volunteers, and their innovative strategies to connect with voters across Delaware. Valerie highlights the challenges they faced as an underdog campaign, the long hours, and the sheer determination that fueled their efforts. The unexpected victory, against all odds, is presented as a testament to their collective hard work, Joe's charisma, and the powerful family bond that underpinned their success.

Chapter 6: The Call

This chapter recounts the devastating car accident in December 1972, just weeks after Joe's Senate victory, which tragically killed his wife, Neilia, and infant daughter, Naomi, and severely injured sons Beau and Hunter. Valerie describes the immediate aftermath, the shock, and the profound grief that engulfed the Biden family. She details the family's rallying around Joe, particularly her own decision to move in and help care for her nephews while Joe grappled with his loss and considered resigning from the Senate. The chapter emphasizes the family's resilience in the face of unimaginable sorrow and Joe's ultimate decision to honor his commitment to public service, taking his oath of office at his sons' hospital bedside.

Chapter 7: The New Normal

Following the 1972 tragedy, Valerie describes the challenging period of adjustment for the Biden family. She details her commitment to helping Joe raise Beau and Hunter, effectively becoming a second mother figure to her nephews. The chapter illustrates the daily struggles and triumphs of rebuilding a family life amidst profound grief, with Joe commuting daily from Delaware to Washington D.C. to be with his sons. Valerie highlights the unwavering support system provided by the extended Biden and Finnegan families, emphasizing how their collective love and practical assistance allowed Joe to continue his Senate duties while prioritizing his children's well-being. This period forged an even deeper bond within the family, characterized by shared responsibility and enduring love.

Chapter 8: The Second Chance

This chapter chronicles Joe Biden's meeting and courtship of Jill Jacobs, who would become his second wife. Valerie recounts the family's initial apprehension about Joe remarrying, particularly Beau and Hunter's cautious acceptance of a new maternal figure. She describes Jill's patience, warmth, and genuine connection with the boys, which gradually won over the entire family. Valerie shares personal anecdotes about Jill's integration into the close-knit Biden clan, highlighting her strength and her ability to bring joy and stability back into Joe's life. The chapter celebrates the rebuilding of their family unit and the profound happiness Jill brought, providing Joe with a renewed sense of purpose and a loving partnership.

Chapter 9: The First Run

Valerie recounts Joe Biden's first presidential campaign in 1988, detailing the excitement and challenges of his initial bid for the White House. She describes her continued role as a key advisor and supporter, witnessing firsthand the rigors of a national campaign. The chapter covers the controversies that led to Joe's withdrawal from the race, including accusations of plagiarism. More significantly, Valerie details the life-threatening health crisis Joe faced shortly after, suffering two brain aneurysms. She describes the family's fear, the intense medical procedures, and Joe's remarkable recovery, emphasizing his resilience and determination to return to public service despite these setbacks.

Chapter 10: The Senate Years

This chapter provides an overview of Joe Biden's long and distinguished career in the U.S. Senate, spanning over three decades. Valerie reflects on his legislative accomplishments, his work on judiciary committees, and his growing expertise in foreign policy. She describes Joe's reputation as a bipartisan dealmaker and his commitment to public service, often highlighting his ability to connect with people from all walks of life. Valerie shares personal insights into the sacrifices and demands of a life in Washington, D.C., and how Joe balanced his professional responsibilities with his unwavering dedication to his family, always returning to Delaware to be with them. The chapter underscores the consistent values that guided his extensive Senate tenure.

Chapter 11: The Vice Presidency

Valerie recounts the momentous decision for Joe Biden to accept Barack Obama's offer to be his running mate in the 2008 presidential election. She describes the family's discussions and their collective support for this new chapter. The chapter details the intensity of the 2008 campaign and their subsequent eight years in the White House as Vice President. Valerie offers an insider's perspective on the challenges and responsibilities of the office, highlighting Joe's close working relationship with President Obama and his efforts on various policy initiatives. She emphasizes Joe's continued commitment to his core values and his role as a trusted advisor, even on the national and international stage.

Chapter 12: The Unimaginable

This chapter addresses the profound tragedy of Beau Biden's battle with and eventual death from brain cancer in 2015. Valerie describes the family's agonizing journey through Beau's illness, the hope, the despair, and the unwavering love and support they provided. She shares the deep personal impact of losing Beau, a beloved son, brother, and father, and the immense grief that once again enveloped the Biden family. Valerie reflects on Beau's character, his dedication to public service, and the legacy he left behind. The chapter also touches upon Joe's decision not to run for president in 2016, a choice heavily influenced by his grief and the need to support his family.

Chapter 13: The Decision

Valerie details the period leading up to Joe Biden's decision to run for president in 2020, following the emotional aftermath of Beau's death and the 2016 election. She describes the intense family discussions, the weighing of personal sacrifices against a sense of duty to the country, and the internal struggle Joe faced. Valerie highlights the encouragement from family, friends, and supporters who believed Joe was the right person to lead the nation during a tumultuous time. The chapter emphasizes the collective family decision-making process, rooted in their shared values and a desire to restore dignity and unity to American politics, ultimately leading to Joe's announcement to seek the presidency.

Chapter 14: The Campaign Trail

This chapter provides an account of the challenging 2020 presidential campaign, which was uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Valerie describes the shift from traditional rallies to virtual events, the difficulties of connecting with voters in a new landscape, and the constant adaptation required. She highlights the family's active involvement, with Valerie herself playing a significant role in supporting Joe and advocating for his vision. The chapter emphasizes the resilience of the campaign team and the Biden family in navigating unprecedented circumstances, focusing on their message of unity, empathy, and restoring the soul of the nation amidst political division and public health crises.

Chapter 15: The Victory

Valerie recounts the tense days following the 2020 election, as votes were counted and the nation awaited the results. She describes the emotional rollercoaster, the anxiety, and the eventual relief and joy when Joe Biden was declared the winner. The chapter captures the significance of the moment for the Biden family, representing the culmination of decades of public service and personal sacrifice. Valerie reflects on the historic nature of the victory, not just for Joe but for the values they had always championed. The chapter conveys a sense of profound accomplishment and hope for the future, marking a new chapter for the family and the country.

Chapter 16: The White House

This chapter offers Valerie's perspective on Joe Biden's early presidency and his transition into the role of Commander-in-Chief. She reflects on the immense responsibilities and challenges he

faced upon entering the White House, from navigating a deeply divided nation to addressing global crises. Valerie emphasizes Joe's unwavering commitment to his principles, his empathy, and his dedication to serving all Americans. She shares insights into the family's continued support and their pride in his leadership, highlighting how his personal experiences and values continue to shape his approach to governing. The chapter underscores the weight of the office and the enduring character of the man holding it.

Chapter 17: The Future

In the concluding chapter, Valerie Biden Owens reflects on the enduring legacy of her family and her hopes for the future. She reiterates the core values of faith, family, and public service that have guided the Bidens throughout their lives. Valerie shares her optimism for the country, emphasizing the importance of unity, compassion, and working together to overcome challenges. She offers a personal message about the power of resilience and the strength found in love and community. The chapter serves as a heartfelt closing, reinforcing the themes of perseverance and the profound impact of family bonds that have been central to her memoir and her brother's journey.

Themes

- Family loyalty
- Political life
- Personal resilience
- Sibling bond
- Women in politics
- Grief and healing

Notable Quotes

- "My parents taught us that the cardinal sin was to be unkind." — Reflecting on the foundational values instilled in her and Joe during their childhood.
- "Joe and I were always a team. We still are." — Describing the enduring and inseparable bond she shares with her brother throughout their lives and careers.
- "There is no 'I' in Biden. It's always been 'we.'" — Emphasizing the collective strength and family-first mentality that defines the Biden family.
- "We learned early on that the only way to get through anything was together." — Speaking about the family's resilience and unity in the face of multiple personal tragedies and public challenges.
- "I never saw myself as a woman in politics, just as a person doing a job that needed to be done." — Reflecting on her groundbreaking role as her brother's campaign manager and her

approach to her career.

• "Grief is a thief, but it also teaches you to hold on tighter to what you have." — Discussing the profound losses the family experienced and the lessons learned about cherishing life and loved ones.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-Biden-Valerie-Owens/dp/1250821762 about?

"Growing Up Biden" is a memoir by Valerie Biden Owens, President Joe Biden's sister. It offers an intimate look at her life, her close relationship with her brother, and her experiences as his long-time political advisor and campaign manager. The book chronicles the Biden family's journey through personal tragedies, political triumphs, and the values that shaped them.

Is https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-Biden-Valerie-Owens/dp/1250821762 worth reading?

For readers interested in American politics, presidential memoirs, or the Biden family, "Growing Up Biden" offers a unique and personal perspective. It provides insights into the human side of political life, the power of family bonds, and the resilience required to navigate public service and personal loss. It's particularly valuable for those seeking an insider's view from a trusted confidante.

How does https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-Biden-Valerie-Owens/dp/1250821762 end?

Spoiler: The book concludes with Valerie Biden Owens reflecting on her life's journey, the culmination of her brother's political career with his presidency, and the enduring lessons learned about family, faith, and public service. She emphasizes the importance of resilience, empathy, and the strong bonds that have sustained her and her family through decades of challenges and triumphs.

Who should read https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-Biden-Valerie-Owens/dp/1250821762?

This book is ideal for readers interested in political memoirs, particularly those focused on the Biden family. It will appeal to individuals curious about the behind-the-scenes dynamics of political campaigns, the role of family in public life, and stories of resilience in the face of adversity. It also offers insights for those interested in the experiences of women in politics.

How long does it take to read https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-Biden-Valerie-Owens/dp/1250821762?

Based on its typical length, "Growing Up Biden" would likely take an average reader approximately 6 to 7 hours to complete. This estimate assumes a reading speed of about 250

words per minute, which is standard for non-fiction.

Questions & Answers

What is the central theme of Valerie Biden Owens' memoir, "Growing Up Biden"?

The central theme of Valerie Biden Owens' memoir is the profound importance of family, resilience in the face of adversity, and the unwavering commitment to public service instilled by her parents. She emphasizes how these values shaped not only her own life but also her brother Joe's political career, highlighting the strength derived from their close-knit family bonds and their shared experiences of joy and profound loss.

How does Valerie describe her relationship with her brother, Joe Biden?

Valerie describes her relationship with Joe Biden as extraordinarily close, marked by deep loyalty, mutual support, and a shared understanding that transcends typical sibling dynamics. She portrays herself as his confidante, advisor, and campaign manager for decades, emphasizing their partnership and the unspoken communication between them. She sees him not just as a brother but as a lifelong friend and a fellow traveler through life's challenges.

What role did Valerie play in Joe Biden's political career?

Valerie Biden Owens played a pivotal and multifaceted role in Joe Biden's political career, serving as his campaign manager for all his Senate campaigns and his early presidential bids. Beyond a professional role, she was his closest political advisor, strategist, and confidante. She managed the logistics, messaging, and emotional support, often being the first person he'd call for advice or to share news, embodying the family's collective commitment to his public service.

How does the book address the family's experience with grief and loss?

The book addresses the Biden family's experience with grief and loss with raw honesty and deep emotion. Valerie recounts the tragic car accident that killed Joe's first wife, Neilia, and their infant daughter, Naomi, and later the death of Beau Biden. She details how these profound losses tested the family's resilience but ultimately strengthened their bonds, emphasizing their collective commitment to supporting each other through unimaginable pain and finding purpose in their shared sorrow.

What challenges did Valerie face as a woman working in political campaigns?

Valerie faced significant challenges as a woman working in political campaigns, particularly in an era when such roles were predominantly held by men. She describes navigating skepticism and underestimation, often having to prove her capabilities and assert her authority in male-dominated environments. She also grappled with balancing her professional ambitions with family responsibilities, highlighting the unique pressures and expectations placed upon women in public life.

What does the title "Growing Up Biden" signify?

The title "Growing Up Biden" signifies more than just a chronological account of childhood; it represents the formative experiences, values, and family dynamics that shaped Valerie and her siblings, particularly Joe. It refers to the unique environment of love, resilience, and public service that defined their upbringing, emphasizing how their shared history and the lessons learned from their parents profoundly influenced their adult lives and careers.

How does Valerie portray her parents and their influence on the Biden children?

Valerie portrays her parents, Catherine Eugenia "Jean" Finnegan Biden and Joseph Robinette Biden Sr., as the foundational pillars of the family, instilling core values of honesty, hard work, empathy, and resilience. She describes them as loving, supportive, and principled individuals who taught their children the importance of family loyalty, overcoming adversity, and dedicating oneself to service, profoundly shaping their character and life choices.

What insights does the book offer into the early life and character of Joe Biden?

The book offers intimate insights into Joe Biden's early life, portraying him as a determined, empathetic, and often mischievous child who developed a strong sense of justice and responsibility from a young age. Valerie details his struggles with stuttering, his athletic pursuits, and his early political awakenings, revealing the foundational experiences and family support that forged his character and laid the groundwork for his future in public service.

Does Valerie share any personal political aspirations in the book?

While Valerie Biden Owens dedicated much of her life to managing her brother's political campaigns, the book primarily focuses on her role as an advisor and strategist rather than her own direct political aspirations. She discusses her passion for public service and advocacy, but her narrative centers on her commitment to supporting Joe and the family's collective political endeavors, rather than pursuing elected office for herself.

How does the book balance personal anecdotes with political history?

The book skillfully balances personal anecdotes with political history by weaving intimate family stories into the broader narrative of Joe Biden's political rise. Valerie uses personal experiences—from childhood memories to moments of profound grief—to illustrate the human side of political life and the values that underpinned their family's involvement in public service. The political history serves as a backdrop, contextualizing the personal journey of the Biden family.

What is Valerie's perspective on public service?

Valerie's perspective on public service is deeply ingrained and highly principled, viewing it as a noble calling rooted in empathy, integrity, and a genuine desire to improve the lives of others. She emphasizes that public service, for the Bidens, is not about personal gain or ambition, but

about making a meaningful difference and upholding the values of fairness and justice, a lesson passed down through generations.

How does the book depict the family's resilience in the face of adversity?

The book powerfully depicts the Biden family's extraordinary resilience in the face of repeated adversity, particularly through the lens of profound personal losses. Valerie illustrates how their strong family bonds, shared faith, and unwavering support for one another allowed them to navigate unimaginable grief and setbacks. She shows that their ability to keep moving forward, finding purpose and strength in unity, is a defining characteristic of the Biden family.

What message does Valerie hope readers take away from her memoir?

Valerie hopes readers take away a message about the enduring power of family, the importance of resilience, and the value of public service. She aims to inspire readers to cherish their loved ones, face challenges with courage, and understand that even in the darkest times, love and connection can provide strength. She also subtly advocates for a more compassionate and principled approach to public life.

How does the book describe the family's move from Scranton to Delaware?

The book describes the Biden family's move from Scranton, Pennsylvania, to Claymont, Delaware, as a pivotal moment driven by economic necessity and her father's pursuit of better opportunities. Valerie recounts the challenges and adjustments of leaving their familiar community but also highlights the family's adaptability and the strong bonds that allowed them to thrive in their new environment, emphasizing their resilience and unity.

What specific campaign moments does Valerie highlight as particularly memorable?

Valerie highlights several memorable campaign moments, including Joe Biden's initial, improbable Senate victory at a young age, which she managed. She also details the emotional challenges and triumphs of his subsequent re-election campaigns and early presidential bids, often focusing on the grassroots efforts, the personal connections made with voters, and the sheer dedication required to navigate the demanding world of political campaigning.

How does Valerie reflect on her own identity separate from being "Joe Biden's sister"?

Valerie reflects on her own identity by acknowledging the deep connection and pride she has in being Joe Biden's sister, while also asserting her distinct professional and personal contributions. She details her own career, her family life, and her advocacy work, demonstrating that while her brother's career was a significant part of her life, she forged her own path and identity, defined by her own strengths and passions.

What role did faith play in the Biden family's life, as depicted in the book?

Faith played a significant and comforting role in the Biden family's life, as depicted in the book. Valerie often references their Catholic upbringing and the solace they found in their beliefs,

particularly during times of profound grief and adversity. She portrays faith not as a rigid dogma, but as a source of strength, hope, and moral guidance that helped them navigate life's challenges and maintain their sense of purpose.

How does Valerie describe the emotional toll of political life on families?

Valerie describes the emotional toll of political life on families as immense, detailing the constant scrutiny, the sacrifices of privacy, and the intense pressure that campaigns and public office entail. She shares personal anecdotes about the stress, the public criticism, and the need for unwavering family support to withstand the demands, emphasizing that political life is a family endeavor that requires collective resilience and commitment.

What advice or lessons does Valerie share about navigating family relationships?

Valerie shares lessons about the paramount importance of unconditional love, loyalty, and open communication in navigating family relationships. She emphasizes the need for mutual support, forgiveness, and the ability to lean on one another during both joyous and challenging times. Her advice implicitly suggests that strong family bonds are a source of immense strength and a foundation for personal and collective success.

Spoiler: How does the book conclude, reflecting on the family's journey?

Spoiler: The book concludes with Valerie reflecting on the culmination of their family's journey, particularly with Joe Biden's election to the presidency. She expresses a profound sense of pride and fulfillment, seeing his achievement as a testament to their shared values, resilience, and the collective efforts of the entire Biden family. The ending emphasizes hope for the future and the enduring legacy of their upbringing.