



Undiscovered Country

Kelly O'Connor McNeess

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An extraordinary novel portraying one of the greatest untold love stories in American politics.

In 1932, New York City, top reporter Lorena “Hick” Hickok starts each day with a front page byline?and finishes it swigging bourbon and planning her next big scoop.

But an assignment to cover FDR’s campaign?and write a feature on his wife, Eleanor?turns Hick’s hard-won independent life on its ear. Soon her work, and the secret entanglement with the new first lady, will take her from New York and Washington to Scotts Run, West Virginia, where impoverished coal miners’ families wait in fear that the New Deal’s promised hope will pass them by. Together, Eleanor and Hick imagine how the new town of Arthurdale could change the fate of hundreds of lives. But doing what is right does not come cheap, and Hick will pay in ways she never could have imagined.

Undiscovered Country artfully mixes fact and fiction to portray the intense relationship between this unlikely pair. Inspired by the historical record, including the more than three thousand letters Hick and Eleanor exchanged over a span of thirty years, McNees tells this story through Hick’s tough, tender, and unforgettable voice. A remarkable portrait of Depression-era America, this novel tells the poignant story of how a love that was forced to remain hidden nevertheless changed history.

Undiscovered Country Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Kelly O'Connor McNees

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Lgbt, Glbt, Queer

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From Reader Review Undiscovered Country for online ebook

Lizzie says

Imminently readable and relatable. I like when historic fiction makes me want to learn more about the actual historic figures in the book. After reading this novel, I wanted to learn more about Hick and her role in Eleanor's life and Roosevelt's White House.

I highly recommend this book if you're at all interested in the Great Depression, the Roosevelts, women in journalism, lesbians in the 1930s, or the domestic arrangements of the wealthy. It's a solid read.

Janelle Bailey says

72: *Undiscovered Country* by Kelly O'Connor McNees...a "gift" from the Book of the Month Club with a deadline for reading and a survey to be completed (an opportunity and assignment I COMPLETELY relished!). This beautifully and well told fictional story is based on the volume of correspondence exchanged between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok, an AP journalist assigned to FDR and his wife during his Presidential campaign. I struggle with the genre, honestly, that is neither true non-fiction nor completely fiction. Historical fiction is not my go-to genre, but when I read it I do so critically, wishing to identify and process appropriately the unbelievable parts as well as the believable ones that then aid my understanding of or fill in the blanks of that time and place. I wrestle even more, I think, with what this is; while McNees is completely honest about the story itself and conveys, even, that one of the characters completely her creation rather than fact, I have a hard time filing it for myself, given that it's based on REAL people and a potentially REAL story...but not truth or fact in its telling. But that is not to indicate at all a dislike or discredit for this story or book. McNees is a talented artist, telling well the story she crafts, using valuable and even poetic devices as well as enjoyable and invigorating diction, and also creating complex and viable characters of these women, making them believable as well as engaging readers in their story. Hopefully BOTM does feature it...and then also gives me the opportunity to do more for them! :)

Renee Rosen says

Kelly O'Connor McNees is simply a beautiful writer. I have adored all her novels and have eagerly been awaiting the release of *Undiscovered Country*. She has a way of capturing characters and setting that stay with you long after you've turned the last page. I can't wait to see what she does next!

Debbie Shoulders says

The relationship of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and AP Journalist Lorena Hickock has inspired several novels. In this one McNees chooses a clear focus and helps the reader understand at least Hickok's point of view. When Hicks, as she was called, got too close to the first family she was let go from the Associated Press. Eleanor got her a job at the White House asking her to report on the conditions of those most affected by the Great Depression. In one case Hick's investigation led to the building of a subsidized housing

development in West Virginia. As is often the case the passion that Eleanor had for helping those in need took precedence to her personal life and Hickok has to learn to deal with that. Based on the papers Hickok left behind McNees interprets the situation as it probably was in those times.

Susan says

A great look behind the curtain at a relationship that has not been covered extensively.

Stephanie says

I love the perceptive writing of Kelly O'Connor McNees and the empathy she feels for her characters; I also have always been fascinated by Eleanor Roosevelt but knew almost nothing about her love story with Lorena Hickok until I read Kelly's novel. How richly she writes the story, whether telling of smoke-filled newsrooms, dingy hotels, strained White House dinners and guestroom luxury, naked starving children across America and or the affinity and love two very different women find with each other. Eleanor, who had come from a wealthy home and dedicated herself to help the poor as her husband was elected President, and "Hick," who had grown up in the worse poverty and abuse to fight her way up as a reporter (and a woman reporter!) in the days of the Depression. Her friends are the guys in the newsroom and her dog; she is a hard drinker and had seen a lot of tragedy and grit. Eleanor, so much in love with this utterly different woman and so abandoned as a wife by her husband Franklin, is utterly idealistic and early on into her love affair with Hick, sketches plans for the day they can live together and never be apart.

But though Eleanor (called "Nora") is deeply in love, she is followed everywhere by Secret Service men; if she and Hick have a few hours privacy together, it is a luxury. Eleanor's life is utterly taken up by her idealistic fight for the poor, and the quiet life she also idealizes with her reporter lover in one small house begins to appear as difficult to create in reality as is decent housing and food for a good part of desperate America. Both the determined reporter and the gracious First Lady are richly portrayed as if instead of opening the pages of a book, you are stepping into a life and watching fascinated from the corner of a room. Two great things are at stake: the future of millions of Americans in the grinding Depression, and the small intimate space and time to allow this love to flourish. How can they have what they so much want? How can any couple have it, so pulled by commitments and yet so deeply pulled together?

A remarkable, deeply human book about two people in love and how they can make that love work in the reality of their world. Brava to the author! Superbly done! To be cherished on my shelf of books to read again.

Lori Spielman says

I adored this sensitively-written novel. McNees is a master of historical detail, and Eleanor and Lorena come alive in this tender story of love and friendship, hope and heartbreak. The stakes couldn't be higher for Eleanor and Lorena, making this page-turning story of forbidden love so bittersweet. Highly recommend.

Elsbeth says

Posting at 1.45am because I finished this ten minutes ago, having started it this evening. I didn't want to leave smart, passionate, generous-hearted Lorena Hickok. Now the book is done and I miss her. A novel that imagines one version of the intense yet semi-mysterious relationship between journalist Hickok (as out as she could manage in 1932) and new First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, based on extant letters between them. Whether a deep friendship or a love affair may never be known for certain, but this imagined version of a requited passion is as glorious and fragile and beautiful as a soap bubble.

Jenny Moore says

This was compelling and readable, with an engaging first-person narrative. It would have benefited from a more historically accurate portrayal of the protagonist, Hick. The author left out some aspects of her work with the Works Progress Administration, such as attitudes and reportage that would now be considered racist and could have contributed to the inequities and even overtly racist policies of some New Deal programs.

That said, this is a good book for introducing the concept of people deliberately written out of history, for a discussion of gender roles and sexuality during this period, and (with additional reading) a discussion on how racism was built into some of the institutions established during this period. A great book club choice.

Bonsai says

There's nothing wrong with this book, except that it can't hold a candle to White Houses. Might return to it someday.

Charlene Nelson says

What a terrific look at the life of two very interesting women. One is so famous that some people have always tried to hide and ignore certain things about her and the other seems to have been lost in history. Kelly O'Connor McNees has really brought to life this short period in the lives of Lorena Hickox and Eleanor Roosevelt, that I felt that many things were made clearer for me. I have always been aware of the whispers about Mrs Roosevelt and her particular friend, so I wasn't surprised to know that this relationship lasted for as long as it did. I really appreciate all the research that went into the writing of this wonderful story. As you read about their first meeting, the development of the deeper relationship one sees all the things that are difficult for Eleanor and Hick, which are things that plague all relationships. Even though both Nora and Hick knew that once FDR took his oath of office as President, their time together would have to take a backseat to all the responsibilities that Eleanor would have to be involved in. Needless to say, I don't think either Hick or Eleanor (Nora) gave much thought to the real situation and that certain things would become more important than what they felt for each other. As Nora tells Hick her freedom came after she confronted Franklin concerning his affair with Missy Hand, her best friend. Once the truce or bargain was made life continued for the public view and each had the privacy they wanted. It is strange how especially in

the 1930's an affair between FDR & Missy was much more accepted then the one between Eleanor & Hick. Some things have not changed! You see just how much Hick is able to help Nora move into her own person by doing the deep research to help Nora set up the Arthurdale project to help move the coal miners families out of the very deep poverty that they were in. You see that Hick is caught between what her editor at the AP wants and the privacy that is needed if she is to continue in the presence of all the Roosevelt staff, especially once they have moved into the White House. One never feels that FDR cared much about the relationship between his wife and Hick. The times that they are on vacation and away from prying eyes, life is good and you can feel that Nora blossoms due to just being with Hick. I was surprised that Hick didn't see just how upset Nora would be once her name/signature is forged by Hick to insure that Ruth Johnson and family would be given a home at Arthurdale. Hick like a lot of people let the rumor mill run away with her feelings and couldn't seem to trust the system. But these are very passionate and deeply complicated individuals. Thank you so much for giving the world this great story and making Lorena Hickox live again to take her rightful place in history.

Wanda says

A beautifully written book that captures the soul of a relationship. It's told through the eyes of Lorena 'Hick' Hickok, an intimate friend of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and, at one point, the country's best known female reporter. Her conflicted feelings about covering the First Lady for the Associated Press as she became emotionally involved are touchingly rendered. And even though the author clearly takes some narrative license, the words and actions between the two women never step beyond the bounds of propriety. I thought Lorena's fieldwork for FDR's Emergency Relief program and the poverty she encountered as an investigator was the most interesting part of the book even though it wasn't its main topic. 4 1/2 stars

Katie says

I would love to read a book about Eleanor and Hick that a) was actually about their romance and b) in Eleanor's POV.

The second one is personal preference, but I am reading these books because I got interested in Eleanor, so they're not really scratching that itch. The second one . . . they got together SO QUICKLY. And Hick was pretty much out, but was it really that easy for Eleanor??? I wanted some actual falling in love!

Oh, and Queer + Historical for Ripped Bodice bingo.

Lbball27 says

Tender and heartbreaking love story. Loved the writing, only criticism is it went by too fast.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY is actually the third fictional account I have read about Lorena "Hick"

Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt. And, I would, without any problems, read at least three more. I find both women fascinating to read about and I like reading new books that take a different look at their relationship.

READ THE REST OF THE REVIEW OVER AT FRESH FICTION!
