



Speaking for Myself: The Autobiography

Cherie Blair

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Cherie Blair's autobiography takes the reader from a childhood in working-class Liverpool to the heart of the British legal system and then, as the wife of the Prime Minister, to 10 Downing Street. It has been an astonishing journey for a woman whose childhood was full of drama, and who grew up with a fierce sense of justice.

Speaking for Myself: The Autobiography Details

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Kathy (Bermudaonion) says

Cherie Blair was the British “First Lady” for ten years. In *Speaking For Myself*, she tells her life story from birth until her husband left office in 2007. Cherie’s father was a successful actor, but he abandoned his family when she was young. Having no other alternative, Cherie along with her mother and her sister lived with her father’s parents in Liverpool. Cherie’s mother worked hard and made a lot of sacrifices. Her father had children by other women, but never made much time for Cherie and her sister. Cherie’s childhood wasn’t unhappy, but it wasn’t always easy.

Cherie was the first member of her family to go to college. She got her law degree (top in her class) and married Tony Blair. Both Cherie and Tony were interested in politics, but she ended up working while he pursued political office. Tony was elected Prime Minister in 1997 and the Blairs and their 3 children moved to Downing Street. Cherie was unique among Prime Ministers’ spouses in that she continued to work. They had another child while he was in office. It seemed that Cherie was often at odds with the British press.

This book provides an interesting peek into what it’s like to be married to the Prime Minister of Great Britain. I have to admit that I didn’t understand all of the political aspects of the book - I don’t know the difference between the Labour Party and the Tories and I don’t understand their election process. All in all, it was an enjoyable book, even though there were no great new revelations.

Christia says

This was a really informative and interesting read that I thoroughly enjoyed. This was on my list to read before I saw a brief interview with Cherie Blair when the book first came out in the US, and that interview only made me want to read the book even more. Mrs. Blair offers a great “behind the scenes” glimpse of life at #10 Downing Street (technically life at #11 Downing Street, since that is where the Blair family actually lived), not to mention a solid portrait (both personal and professional) of Tony Blair, including the experiences that have molded his personality, values, and political career. I particularly liked the fact that some of the secretaries at Downing Street are referred to as “garden girls” because their office is located near the garden.

There are two sides to every story, but after reading this I can see why the British press may not have liked her. She is obviously a very bright, strong willed, independent woman who often seems to speak first and think second, and who no doubt refused to be cast in what is most likely the expected role of a quiet, compliant Prime Minister’s wife. (Not knowing the first thing about the experiences of the other wives who preceded her, I could be wrong, but I doubt it. An example of her speaking possibly too quickly is when at her final departure from Downing Street, much to her husband’s chagrin, her response to the reporters was, “Bye – I won’t miss you!”). It also seems to me that her personality appears very different from her more subdued husband.

Being the Anglophile that I am, I enjoyed her descriptions of the members of the royal family. The references to British politics, particularly their legal/judicial system, were a little confusing, but then again I read those parts of the book pretty quickly.

It's also always very interesting to me to find out how others view the US and our leaders. I enjoyed reading about her opinions of both the Clintons and the Bushes and it was interesting to compare the lifestyles and resources of the White House to #10 Downing Street too. Apparently the First Lady is afforded many more resources than the Prime Minister's wife. I also enjoyed reading about the Prime Minister's weekend home, Chequers, which I assume is the British version of the President's Camp David. Cherie's experiences with other heads of state were at times apparently very memorable and were amusing to read about. Obviously there was tension with Blair's press secretary Alastair Campbell, which Cherie makes no attempt to deny. (I am certain that if I ever read anything Campbell wrote about his experience with the Blairs, his perspective would be the complete opposite and Cherie would not be painted in a good light).

I thought it was interesting that Cherie spent more time reflecting on her introductions with the pope (she is Catholic) than she did discussing the subway bombs in London. Her trips to the Vatican were obviously very significant to her (and understandably so). Her own background, including her challenging childhood in Liverpool, sheds light on her outspokenness and personality as well. (Her parents were both actors, and she grew up in her paternal grandmother's house with her mother after her father left them, which was a tremendous influence on her need to be self supporting later in life).

I would recommend this to other Anglophiles, those who enjoy biographies, and those who enjoy current events. I can see where Cherie might rub some the wrong way, but I liked her feistiness.

Margaret says

I enjoyed this book and was especially gripped by her account of her early life. I found that later on, the chapters' chronological progression was a bit difficult to follow. I wished that rather than go through everything in time sequence, that she would just talk about an event or a person. I also found some of the legal jargon and Number 10 jargon confusing.

I am puzzled by this paragraph and wonder if the last part of this book was not carefully edited (p.394 of the airport edition):

"Each culture brings its problems. In countries where sexual activity is rife, you have HIV/Aids. In those countries where young women are married as soon as they become sexually active, too early pregnancies result in fistulas..."

-In which countries is sexual activity more rife than in others? Aren't we as humans as sexual as each other in each country?

-Does she mean in the other sentence rather than 'sexually active', 'sexually mature'?

Dianne says

After reading her life story I have tremendous admiration for Cherie Blair. She is a positive role model for all females of any age, religion or race. She is the mother of four, a judge, a barrister in her own right, the head

of many charities for women and children, an author, a singer and the wife of one of the world's most influential men. What is most interesting about her though is her personality. I can imagine being at a party in which she was in attendance; it would surely be fun no matter what part of the political spectrum you fall into. Her love for Tony Blair is matched in intensity, of this she is sure. Speaking for herself she says, "He shrugged his shoulders, took my hand and gave me a grin, that infectious grin that I have not been able to resist. He grinned because he loves me. Because he knows that I just couldn't help myself. In the end, part of the reason he loves me is my unpredictable character. I am impulsive and he is not. I am the abrasiveness against which he can spark."

Rob Allen says

I found the first part of the book really interesting.....especially bearing in mind I do not really have the highest regard for this woman or her husband.

However, the second part of the book I could not get over, a woman whom had to pull herself up by her bootlaces, go through law school, become a barrister then a QC at a time which was extremely difficult for her and given her unprivileged background who got where she did on results and merit (an achievement much to be admired)

Then why oh why could Mrs Blair be so gullable to be "conned" by various others then to play the blame game really made my teeth grind(I have always found that when you really mess up it is better to take responsibility) I would love to see her cross examined on many of the situations in the book for her responses!

As for her views on Alistair Campbell, well I would imagine it must have been a nightmare for him trying to limit the damage from the flats in Bristol! Carole Caplin etc.

Jessica says

I really enjoyed this book. It was read for book club and I was looking forward to reading this one. I didn't know anything about Tony Blair's wife. The book is about her life. She is a very impressive woman in her own right. She was a very supportive wife, which is generally the case behind a great man. Some things surprised me about them, they are so smart intellectually the 2 of them, but in some ways they were both quite dumb. My favorite part of the book was when the prime minister of Italy wanted Tony Blair to see a masseur and he didn't like the idea of a masseur or a massage. His wife told him that the guy was the masseur to the whole Milan (or somewhere) soccer team so he wasn't going to be wanting Tony's body. ha ha!! In reference to the financial pressures they were under to dress well, etc... I have also read Laura Bush's book and though they had a lot more personal money, she too talked of similar difficulties at the White House. For example, you had to appear in a designer gown and not be seen in it twice or you'd be mocked, but the government didn't pay for these extravagances. Laura Bush brought a lot of the same points up, even though this book makes it look like the American President must have made it in the shade. I like autobiographies and biographies so if you do it's a good read.

Elaine says

If anything, I'd call this a "recounting". I don't know whether Cherie was looking to protect the privacy of her family, but I never got a good sense of what it was like for all of them on 10 Downing Street. And, frankly, other than the clear battles she had with the press and the press secretary, I'm not sure how much she enjoyed her time as wife of the PM. OK, she continued her career, had to fight for a hairdresser while on travel, make great personal connections with the Clintons and the Bushes, and had some good/bad/ugly vacations in Europe. But somehow, it just didn't pull together. I kept waiting for the insights . . .

April says

I was surprised at how much I enjoyed this book. I'm not exactly sure what it is that fascinated me. The writing is good. But there isn't really a plot, just a recounting of her experiences. And it isn't really a great tell-all sort of book. There aren't any details of private lives or behind the scenes politicking exposed.

I enjoyed the retelling of Cherie's childhood and early career. I am always interested to learn about the life experiences of others.

Mr. Blair's rise to power seemed almost a little serendipitous--although that might just be because Ms. Blair is the wife and not the political strategist.

I finished it, so it is a good read. Nothing exceptional, but not a waste of time.

Catharine says

To my delighted surprise, I enjoyed this candid, witty biography.

Jennifer says

Ok, I admit it. I read for some good junk reading. Here is the scoop, this is really two books - one where Cherie grows up and has an interesting childhood as well as her career path and then the second book where she basically uses the book to explain her scandals (she can't believe some of them) and also do some payback on people. So the first part of the book is good and the second, is well, boring or hard to believe that it is the same person.

Also, her husband, Tony Blair, doesn't come off very well nor do we learn much about him. We do learn that he proposes to her, well sort of, while she is scrubbing his bachelor pad toilet. She seems to get walked on and then can't understand why the Prime Minister's wife shouldn't be socializing with a stylist who is dating a con man. And this woman is a judge in law court. You shake your head and wonder if she is telling us the truth.

Gina says

Ah Cherie, I always wondered why the brilliant Tony was married to a sharp-tongued Scouse....as the Liverpudlians call their nasties. Halfway through the memoir, I recant a bit of that wonder as the woman does have some good points, but why did she feel she had to write about her day by day experiences with everyone from plumber to baby Leo filling his diaper? Why does she show a sloppy Tony who likely leaves the toilet seat up? Who cares? She got lucky being catapulted onto the World Scene, and no doubt she's got a sharp brain, but her little vignettes show her dauntless mettle and diminish Blair, so that first nagging question is still with me.

On the other hand, Tony Blair supported Bushie II. How smart is that? Maybe my hero worship of the glib PM and my natural attraction to that accent has peaked. By the time (if) I finish this read, he may be relegated to the ash bin.

The final grade for Speaking for MYself is a C+ because the interest level spiked dramatically when Princess Diana, Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton and Hillary entered the story. Cherie does embody a woman with a career who is married to the PM of Britain and succeeds in being a good mother to four children, but Hello? Since one can't return the kids, how about putting the job on the back burner for however long Tony lasts? The woman is undoubtedly feisty and sponsored many human rights involving children, and she is loyal to Blair even to defending his blind Bush spot.

Marlene says

Cherie Blair is a very straight forward, outspoken woman. I really enjoyed this book (but then I am partial to autobiographies). There were times when I was not sure of the meaning of some of her words and it was hard for me to follow her law career and Tony's political career; however, that comes from my own lack of knowledge of some British English, of the British legal system, and of the British political system. That is no fault of the author's. I was not aware of the differences between 10 Downey St. and 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.; in the differences in the roles of the PM's wife and the First Lady; of the differences in money allotted to the PM's wife and the first lady. I not only enjoyed reading about her own personal life (starting out on the wrong side of the tracks, she surely came a long way), but also her stories about people she met and had to deal with. A very interesting read.

Kristine says

I saw this book in a bookstore in Great Britain this past summer and wanted to read it. I didn't have room in my suitcase for it, but I looked it up when I got home.

Cherie Blair is the wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The first third of the book is about her childhood. She was raised by her mother and grandmother, had a challenging childhood but managed to become a barrister.

I found the behind-the-scene details of life in No. 10 Downing Street very interesting. She discusses the loss of privacy, handling a difficult British press and visits with the Clintons and Bushes. Being the prime minister's wife is much more difficult than being the wife of the United States' president.

She's had an interesting life. While the book isn't particularly well written, I felt like she was a friend sitting beside me telling me about her life.

I wondered if this version was an Americanized version. She makes some comments about the British way and explains some terms that might not be familiar to the non-British. There were a few places where I was confused because I wasn't familiar with British politics.

Dara says

I will admit to getting this because the reviews in the British press were so entertainingly eviscerating. So is it as bad as they say? Yes and no. Blair WAY overshadows personal details about her sex life--both with and without Tony--in a way that made me cringe. And the book itself just isn't that well done--it's sort a rote march through her entire history, without much thought to which parts would be more interesting for the reader. It's also striking how little reflection is in the narrative--about the only commentary on events is emphasizing over and over again how mean various politicians and media figures were to her. The only part of the reviews that I disagree with is what the British press called an embarrassing focus on money--I think it's probably a cultural difference, but I didn't think she went out of line in that respect at all. She does complain a bit about the financial pressures her family was under and how little support the government gives to the Prime Minister in his or her personal capacity, but judging from the examples she gives--invited by Laura Bush to take an official visit to Africa to raise awareness about various issues and charities there, Blair was told she would have to pay for the entire trip personally--I have to agree that her complaints are reasonable.

All in all, I found the book entertaining, but more from the perspective of "I can't believe she's writing that!" than for any insights into the Blair years as such.

Isobel says

I didn't really have an opinion about Cherie Blair but I gathered the press didn't like her much. She interested me from the viewpoint of the unexpected 4th child! 'Speaking for Myself' paints a picture of a well meaning, hard working family-orientated woman marvelling at her good fortune to have a ringside seat on international events for a decade. She pays for this privilege by being the target of sniping from all sides. The book is very self-effacing in some respects - so different from Alistair Campbell's Diaries. It's an easy read with lots of humour. My only criticism is the last 50 pages seems to be a hotch-potch of unrelated themes which she seemed desperate to include but which don't seem to have fitted into the chronology.
