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BY STEFAN LONCE + M.H. FRYBURG

## MY FATHER AT 100

By Ron Reagan

Viking - \$25.95

*MY FATHER AT 100*, by Ron Reagan, is the perfect book for readers who are Ronald Reagan fans...and even for readers who aren't.

Tellingly, Ron Reagan has called his book a "memoir" rather than a "biography," because it's primarily about the relationship between the author and his father, who

died in 2004, from Alzheimer's disease. Ronald Reagan would have been 100 on 2-11-2011, which explains the book's title (it was published in 2011).

The picture that Ron Reagan paints of his father was of a sensitive, creative boy, inspired by his mother, who grew up poor, with a father who had a "serious problem" with alcohol. Ron's grandfather, Jack Reagan, went on alcoholic benders that caused him to be arrested, and to lose jobs – he was a shoe salesman; Jack and his older son, Neil Reagan, later survived the Great Depression only because they got jobs with the New Deal's public works agencies.

In his memoir, Ron Reagan explains how his father, like many children of alcoholics, learned to avoid conflict, in part by ignoring it: "My father often frustrated my mother by conveniently checking out of dinnertime confrontations.... He was always acutely uncomfortable with roiling emotion and harsh words."

Ron Reagan also wrote about his road trips to various towns in Illinois, where Ronald Reagan was born and raised, where he was a lifeguard at the Rock River (he rescued 77 swimmers), and where he graduated from Eureka College. Ron Reagan's prose is not just polished – it's elegant! Ronald Reagan, the father, was a great writer who wrote his own speeches before he was elected President in 1980, and Ron Reagan, the son, has obviously inherited his father's literary talent.

Here's another quote from *MY FATHER AT 100*: "Like all my siblings, I loved my father deeply, at times longingly. He was easy to love but hard to know. He was seldom far from our minds, but you couldn't help wondering sometimes whether he remembered you once you were out of his sight."

Ron Reagan also wrote about his father's love of the outdoors, of riding horses, and of building things at the ranches that his parents owned. Governor Reagan was a great environmentalist -- he signed laws that preserved scenic wilderness areas, added to California's state's parks, and reduced air pollution.

Ronald Reagan was a huge FDR fan. "I voted for FDR four times. I'm trying to undo the Great Society [not the New Deal]," Reagan wrote in his second

autobiography, *An American Life*. FDR's conversational yet confident way of speaking on the radio inspired RR, who got his first radio job – he was a sportscaster – in 1932, in Iowa. In 1937 RR went to Hollywood and FDR, who loved movies, may have seen RR on the silver screen.

President Reagan preserved – and strengthened! – President Roosevelt's greatest domestic legacy: Social Security. On 8-14-1935, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law. "We can never insure one hundred per cent of the population against one hundred per cent of the hazards and vicissitudes of life but we have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family...against poverty-ridden old age," FDR said.

Social Security was financially secure from 1940, when it started paying benefits, until the late 1970's, when stagflation (inflation + economic stagnation = stagflation) pushed Social Security to the verge of insolvency. On 9-24-1981, President Reagan appointed the bipartisan Greenspan Commission, which recommended that Social Security be expanded to include more workers, that the retirement age be increased and benefits slightly decreased, and that mandatory FICA Social Security insurance premiums (commonly called "payroll taxes") be increased. After President Reagan signed the Social Security Amendments of 1983, incorporating the Greenspan Commission's recommendations, into law on 4-20-1983, he said: "Today we reaffirm Franklin Roosevelt's commitment that Social Security must always provide a secure and stable base so that older Americans may live in dignity."

Today, thanks to President Reagan, since 1983, Social Security has amassed \$2.8 trillion in surpluses, which are invested in special non-marketable Treasury bonds, and is projected to continue earning surpluses until 2022. Social Security reform, together with sensible immigration reform (the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which RR signed into law on 11-6-1986, provided amnesty for 3 million illegal immigrants), and tax reform (the Income Tax Reform Act of 1986, which RR signed into law on 11-22-1986, lowered rates, closed loopholes, and treated all income identically, regardless of its source) were President Reagan's greatest domestic accomplishments. President Roosevelt would have been quite proud of President Reagan, who, in 1983, enthusiastically authorized the construction of the FDR Memorial in Washington, near the White House.

Ronald Reagan was, at heart, a moderate, not the fire-breathing radical right-winger he was often depicted as. "Beyond a fondness for nonintrusive government and lower taxes (you will recall that the top marginal tax rate for most of his years in office was 50 percent), my father had little in common with the rage mongering infecting his party today. Short circuiting the functions of government, potentially driving the country into ruin just to score political points by pinning the blame on the opposition, are tactics he would consider unpatriotic, not to mention undemocratic," Ron Reagan wrote in his most excellent book.

Ronald Reagan's greatest unknown accomplishment took place on 8-21-1970, when Governor Reagan signed the law authorizing California to issue vanity license plates, which provides that the plate fees are paid to the California Environmental License Plate Fund. Today, thanks to Governor Reagan, California's 1 million vanity plates EARN it \$38 million annually for environmental protection programs, statewide. Amazingly, vanity license plates are another thing that FDR and RR had in common: Franklin Delano Roosevelt had the first-known vanity plates, on his cars with hand controls he designed after he was paralyzed by polio, which said: **FDR**.

While searching for a photograph of Governor Reagan signing the law authorizing California to issue vanity license plates – none exists – we discovered

amazing, black-and-white newspaper photos (taken by *Sacramento Bee* photographers), and we self-published our 2011 *RONALD REAGAN LOVES KIDS COLLECTIBLE CALENDAR BY STEFAN LONCE*, which has great black-and-white photos of the Reagans from their Sacramento years (1967 - 1975).

In 2010, we sent Ron Reagan a copy of the calendar (we are now disassembling the unsold calendars, and selling the amazing photos as mounted, matted prints), through his agent, Laurie Jacoby (Ron Reagan frequently appears as a political commentator on TV), so we decided to send President Reagan's youngest son this review, with some interview questions. The questions, and Ron Reagan's answers, are below.

**Q: What was your father's greatest strength?**

*A: Simple human decency. He treated everyone with the same respect and compassion.*

**Q: What was your father's greatest weakness?**

*A: The naive faith that other people would generally act in accord with simple human decency.*

**Q: Your brother-in-law, Dennis Revell, told us that Ronald Reagan was the funniest man he ever met. Do you agree, or disagree? (Please explain your answer.)**

*A: I've met a lot of very funny people – George Carlin; Steve Martin; Robin Williams. Funniest person is a pretty high bar. Still, my father was funny. He had great timing and understood how to deliver a punch line. My maternal grandmother and he had regular phone calls where they would crack each other up trading dirty jokes.*

**Q: We don't think that Ronald Reagan would have been elected Governor or President without Nancy Reagan's advice, particularly about people, since, as you wrote, she was a much better judge of people, and what they wanted, than he was. What do you think?**

*A: She was his radar and backstop. She provided a calm, safe space that enabled him to function.*

**Q: How are your parents alike, and how are they different?**

*A: As my father would say of my mother, "she's a worrier." My father, famously, was not.*

**Q: Did you know about your father's role in enacting and promoting California's vanity license plates before we sent you our 2011 calendar?**

*A: Not until you reminded me.*

**Q: Did your father ever discuss California's vanity plates, and his efforts to enact and promote them, with you?**

*A: Probably. But life is long, memory short.*

**Q: Your mother had one of the first vanity plates that California issued; the plate says 111 NDR – she wanted a plate with her initials, but there were concerns about her security so the DMV added the meaningless 111 to the plate so that people wouldn't know that it was the Governor's wife's car. Did she ever discuss her vanity plate with you? If so, why did she want the plate and what did she like about it?**

*A: If it helped my father do what he wanted to do, she'd happily have a vanity plate.*

**Q: Do you now have, or have you ever had, a vanity license plate? If so, what did the plate(s) say and what did it/they mean?**

*A: I considered one for my wife. She was unenthusiastic.*

*Stefan Lonce is the editor of The Montauk Sun; M.H. Fryburg is an attorney and author in Croton-on-Hudson, NY. Lonce and Fryburg are working on two books: DRIVING WITH FDR: A CALENDARICAL BIOGRAPHY and a book about vanity license plates; their web site is www.DrivingWithFDR.com.*