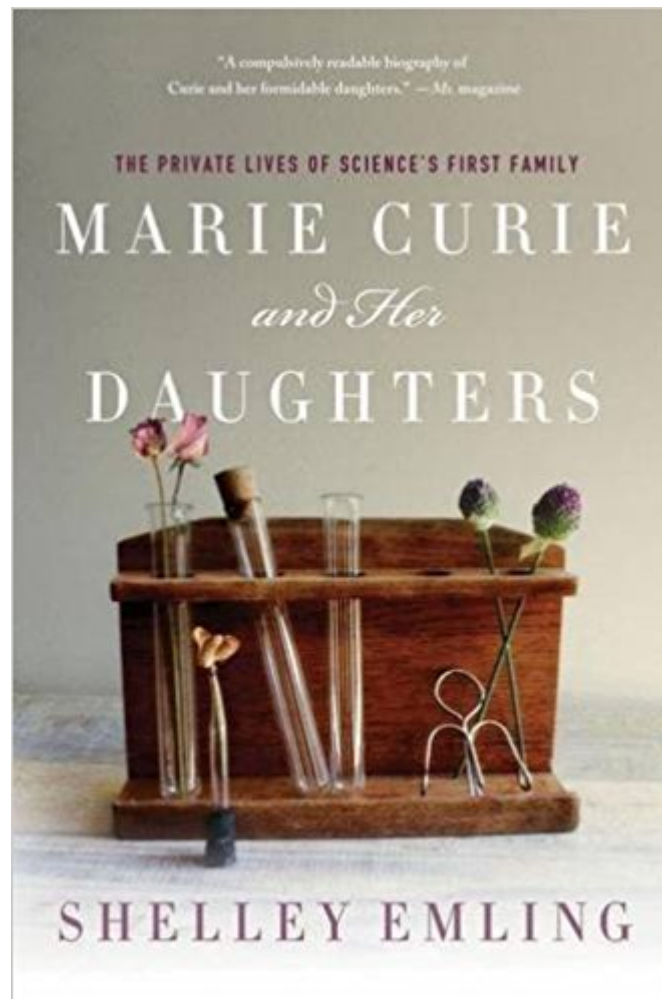


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Marie Curie And Her Daughters: The Private Lives Of Science's First Family



Synopsis

Published to widespread acclaim, in *Marie Curie and Her Daughters*, science writer Shelley Emling shows that far from a shy introvert toiling away in her laboratory, the famed scientist and two-time Nobel prize winner was nothing short of an iconoclast. Emling draws on personal letters released by Curie's only granddaughter to show how Marie influenced her daughters yet let them blaze their own paths: Irene followed her mother's footsteps into science and was instrumental in the discovery of nuclear fission; Eve traveled the world as a foreign correspondent and then moved on to humanitarian missions. Emling also shows how Curie, following World War I, turned to America for help. Few people know about Curie's close friendship with American journalist Missy Meloney, who arranged speaking tours across the country for Marie, Eve, and Irene. Months on the road, charming audiences both large and small, endeared the Curies to American women and established a lifelong relationship with the United States that formed one of the strongest connections of Marie's life. Factually rich, personal, and original, this is an engrossing story about the most famous woman in science that rips the cover off the myth and reveals the real person, friend, and mother behind it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like many readers interested in women and science, I knew little about pioneering scientist Marie Curie's life after the death of her husband, Pierre, and her first Nobel Prize. This book fills a gap in public knowledge covering nearly three decades in Marie Curie's life after Pierre's death, including her subsequent tragic affair with a married fellow scientist that nearly cost her the career she had struggled to build, her second Nobel prize and her difficulties balancing her work and parenting two

equally brilliant daughters, Irene and Eve. The book also goes into detail about the interesting subsequent lives of Irene Curie-Joliot, a famous scientist in her own right and Eve, who became a well-known journalist. The book was written with the cooperation of Irene's daughter, who is also a scientist and gave the author access to Curie family correspondence that apparently was not previously available to the public. The book is kind towards its subjects, but is truthful about their personal flaws as well as their strengths. Marie's near-nervous breakdown over her love affair and Irene's blindness about the dictatorial Communist regimes she admired astonished me and expanded my knowledge of the two women, whom I had previously viewed as passionless professionals. Marie's and Irene's struggles to keep working, despite serious illnesses resulting from overexposure to radioactive substances they researched, was inspiring. The author writes about science in a clear manner, and discussions of the Curies' work are balanced with fascinating details of their personal lives. This is definitely a book to give the married career woman in your life or a young female relative who is thinking of going into the sciences as a career.

Marie Curie won the Nobel Prize for both chemistry and physics. That is all I knew before I read this book. I am not a good science student. Shelley Emling succeeds in making scientific discovery interesting to read. I learned about the benefits and dangers of radium. Radium and simple X-ray technology have been used to treat cancer for almost a hundred years. Marie Curie's passion for the development of radium and the treatment of cancer is a strong theme in this book. Radium is also highly radioactive. Long term exposure to radium can cause health problems like hearing loss, low blood pressure and vision problems. I did not know how much effort went into mining for radium. I learned that one ounce of radium cost \$50,000 in 1921. Radium could also be found in products like cigarettes and chocolate. There are numerous schools and treatment centers in France, Poland and New York that bear Marie Curie's name. I also learned that Marie Curie enjoyed reading poetry. Emling cites a poem entitled "To The Young" by Adam Asnyk. This is a very inspirational poem about the hunger and quest to keep learning. I like this poem very much. I did not know that Marie had two daughters. They were successful in their respective careers as well. This is because of Marie's support and encouragement. Irene, her eldest daughter, developed an injection that is now used to treat leukemia. Irene also discovered artificial radioactivity. Her work has helped doctors locate the flow of blood and nutrients into different organs in the body. Marie also had another daughter named Eve. She wrote a biography of her mother that became an Academy nominated film in 1943. Eve is also credited as being the first lady of United Nations Children's Fund or UNICEF.

As a child I read Eve Currie's biography of her mother, "Madam Curie". (Actually, I read my mother's Reader's Digest Condensed Books version.) With my interest in science I was captivated by the woman who discovered radium and polonium, saved lives on the battlefields of WWI, and won two Nobel Prizes. This book has a different focus, and a less reverential tone. Marie's early work with Pierre is only passingly referred to. The book opens in 1911, and really gets going with Marie, and teenaged daughter Irene, caught up in battlefield medicine during the First World War. After the war France was impoverished, and Marie struggled to find radium for her institute. At this point Missy Meloney, American journalist and organizer, enters the Curie world. In 1921 she brings Madam Curie and daughters Irene and Eve to America for a tour. Marie not only gets her radium, but finds she is a star in America. In France she couldn't even gain admission to the Academy of Sciences, two Noble Prizes not being enough to compensate for her being a woman. (Many years later Irene, with a Nobel of her own, was likewise rejected. Author Emling notes that at least they were consistent.) Emling follows the three Curies forward through the rest of Marie's life and through the lives of Irene and Eve. Meloney remains a key player, often helping one Curie or another. Marie remains an indefatigable and dedicated scientist to the end. She defends her radium and her institute; after her death, the Radium Institute was fittingly renamed the Curie Institute. Irene inherited her mother's scientific aptitude and drive. With husband Frederic she was the first to induce radioactivity in non-radioactive materials. They also nearly became the first to observe nuclear fission.

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