



FLAT CHAMPAGNE: Tree's lavish party life notwithstanding, *No Regrets* has little sparkle.

A Tree Grown in Boston

PARTY GIRL MARIETTA TREE THOUGHT SHE COULD DO BETTER THAN TO REMAIN A PEABODY. ALAS, SHE DID WORSE.

By JOHN SEDGWICK

NO REGRETS

By Caroline Seebohm, *Simon & Schuster*, \$27.50

BY THE GENEALOGICAL STANDARDS of Boston society, the illustrious Marietta Tree was part of my greater family—a niece of my father's first wife. I know her four brothers, especially the former Massachusetts governor Endicott Peabody, aka Chub, who took me to meet President Kennedy at a Harvard football game a month before his assassination. But I never met the world-class socialite Marietta, and this spritely biography, *No Regrets*, by society writer Caroline Seebohm, explains why.

Marietta was born a Peabody—a granddaughter of the inestimable rector of

Groton School (which I attended) and daughter of the Episcopal bishop Malcolm (who christened me)—but unlike most Peabodys, she thought she could do better than to remain one. Alas, she may have ended up doing worse. As this biography shows, there were some attainments. Most famously, she served in the United Nations under Ambassador Adlai Stevenson—in both senses of the preposition. (Am I being primly Peabody-ish to point out that she was married to the faded English aristocrat Ronald Tree at the time?) But mostly she was a political socialite of the Pamela Harriman/Arianna Huffington persuasion, with an emphasis on the socialite. Her life was a giddy swirl of A-list parties with Bill and Babe Paley, David and Evangeline Bruce, et al. With Mrs. Bennett Cerf and Kitty Carlisle Hart she crooned “I’m just mad about Henry” at Henry Kissinger’s seventieth birthday party—and so what if he was a Republican? When Marietta told her mother, the civil-rights activist Mary Parkman Peabody, that Hollywood superagent Swifty Lazar had made a deal for her memoirs, her mother nailed her: “Oh, and what will you write about?”

Your parties?” *[Continued on page 150]*

John Sedgwick is a writer-at-large for *GQ* magazine, the national correspondent for *Self*, and a contributing editor at *The American Benefactor*.

ARTFUL DODGER

Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin takes us out to the ballgame.

By STEVE BUCKLEY

WAIT TILL NEXT YEAR

By Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Simon & Schuster*, \$25

THE TITLE OF DORIS KEARNS Goodwin's new book, *Wait Till Next Year*, is a literary curve ball. It suggests baseball and the late great Brooklyn Dodgers, whose fans became old hands at waiting till next year, but be warned: This is not a baseball book. Hence, the curve. True, the publishers do note, below the title, that this is “A Memoir,” but Goodwin has become so intertwined with the history of the Brooklyn Dodgers that it would be easy to mistake this book as one of those behind-the-scenes, as-told-to jobs that profess to bring the

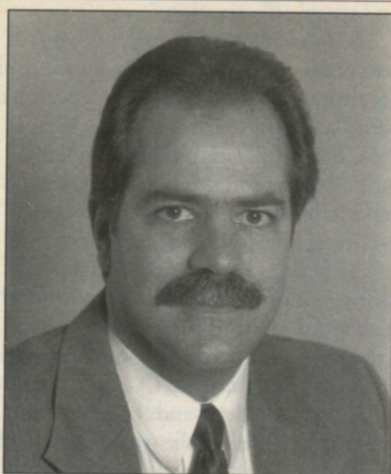


fan right inside old Ebbets Field.

Goodwin, remember, was one of the leading talking heads in documentary filmmaker Ken Burns's epic nine-part series on the history of baseball. Before Burns trained his cameras on her, Goodwin was best known as a superb writer and historian who has explored the lives of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson (for whom she and her husband, Richard Goodwin, once worked), and the Kennedys. But Burns reintroduced her as a hopeless baseball romantic who rooted for Dem Bums as a girl growing up on Long Island, and who, in adulthood—the Dodgers having long since relocated to Los Angeles—learned to cry all over again as a Red Sox fan.

Indeed, Goodwin observes that she

Steve Buckley writes a sports column for the *Boston Herald* and hosts his own talk show Saturday mornings on Sportsradio 850 WEEI.



Our BMW salesman, Richard Valente, really “goes the distance” for his customers. In addition to extending himself on every customer’s behalf (his Customer Satisfaction Index scores are among the highest in the area) he also drives more than 100 miles round trip a day from his home in Rhode Island.

After a youth spent buying, selling and racing sports cars Richard got serious about the automobile business. In fact, he was one of the country’s top 10 Porsche salespeople and the country’s youngest Porsche/Audi Sales Manager. He bought an imported car dealership and, unfortunately, became one of the many casualties of the 1991 Rhode Island banking crisis. So, he joined the Sales Department at our Award-Winning Rolls-Royce, Mercedes-Benz and BMW dealership.

During nearly two decades in the Rhode Island imported auto business Richard developed a strong following of customers who continue to rely on him for his knowledge, advice, personal attention and extraordinary service. On his daily commute he regularly brings his customer’s cars to our dealership for repairs and maintenance or delivers new or used cars for test drives and demonstrations.

Richard Valente’s customers continue to benefit from the same personal attention they received at his own dealership which is not surprising because as an Employee-Owned company, this is also his own dealership.

Foreign Motors West

253 No. Main St. Natick, MA
(617)235-9096 (508)655-5350
“An Employee-Owned Company”

Tree [Continued from page 146]

A life of such ease, however, can be a strain. Marietta had to kiss off her first husband, Desmond FitzGerald, upon his return from three years’ service in World War II because, having fended off the advances of filmmaker John Huston, she’d fallen in love with Tree, who was richer than Desie, more dependable, and English besides. Her mother, of course, had a few choice things to say about that, too: “You have let down your family and your society and your God,” she began, before ripping her apart at some length.

Marietta saw little of daughter number one, Frances FitzGerald, who went on to prominence as a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, and even less of daughter number two, Penelope Tree, who took over from Twiggy as the sixties’ “It” girl. But Marietta would die for a party. For the last year of her life, she kept her terminal breast cancer a secret, ascribing her emaciation to the flu, while she scrambled to fit her radiation treatments around her social engagements. In the end, when daughters Frankie and Penelope selected a keepsake to put in the grave with her, they chose her red leather appointment book.

It is difficult to write an enthralling biography of a subject who has no discernible inner life, and I can’t say I knew Marietta much better at the end of *No Regrets* than I did at the beginning. Curiously, another high-society relative of mine who has been biographized, my cousin Edie Sedgwick, was illuminated far more tellingly. Edie was no less a party girl than Marietta, but at least she accumulated witnesses to her spectacle who were able to evoke her for those who weren’t there. For all her many contacts among the party set, nobody seems to have been able to convey why Marietta was worth inviting. As Seebohm herself makes clear, Marietta rarely had much to say, and, to spare herself embarrassment at her own fêtes, often turned to her most illustrious guest to lead “gen con,” or general conversation, thus freeing her from any obligation to participate. It wasn’t until I saw the photos that ran with the excerpt in the September issue of *Vanity Fair* (my pre-publication book galleys included none) that I sensed what Marietta was all about. She is seated next to John Huston, and her face is alight with a look of such bright-eyed rapture that I could see in a twinkling why she had men groveling on two continents: Marietta doesn’t just pay attention, she lavishes it with an intensity that is nearly orgasmic. *No Regrets* conveys little of this sparkle, and the champagne of her life seems flat as a result. Instead, one reads on largely to see what trouble this

poor little rich girl will get into next. How will Marietta escape John Huston’s clutches? How will she win over the servants at Ronnie’s Ditchley estate? How will she get by on \$350,000 a year?

The closest I ever came to seeing Marietta was at her aunt Margery Peabody’s 90th birthday party at Chub Peabody’s house in Hollis, New Hampshire. Unfortunately, I arrived a little late, and by then Marietta had already left—for another party in Boston that, Seebohm notes in a parenthesis, was “more interesting.” So I never knew her. After reading *No Regrets*, I doubt anyone did. **B**

Artful Dodger [Continued from page 147]

language would be made known to others . . . One day, as we sat in our circle trying to decide whose turn it was to be accused, we chose instead not to play anymore. It was as if a terrible fever had gripped us, and now it was broken. We moved the chair and table back to their proper places and never again conducted our mock trials. Our child’s version of the McCarthy hysteria had come to an end.” McCarthyism has been revisited thousands of times over the years, but rarely from such a grassroots perspective.

Not to worry, though: Doris isn’t always so heavy. She also tells us about how the Goldschmidts were the first family on the block to have television, and how she and some friends would ring up Mr. Brand’s soda shop and pull the old Prince-Albert-in-a-can gag. The funniest moment in the book comes when she compares her idolatry of Jackie Robinson with her childhood friend Elaine’s fascination with the Yankees’ Billy Martin. Writes Goodwin, “How she could compare the tiny, hysterical Martin to the noble Robinson defied my comprehension.”

True, some of her baseball history needs to be cleaned up. She tells us that Dodgers outfielder Dixie Walker was known as the “the People’s Choice,” rather than “the People’s Cherce” (as noted in the *Baseball Encyclopedia*). She would have us believe that the famous Abe Stark sign at Ebbets Field stated, “Hit this sign, Win a suit,” rather than the simple, widely quoted, “Hit sign, win suit.” She also states in her account of the 1986 World Series that it had been 70 years since the Red Sox won the Series (it had been 68 years). And she boo-hoos Bucky Dent’s home run by saying it “lost the pennant” for the Red Sox, when it really cost the team the American League East title. Some of this is nitpicking, but history is history, and even Doris Kearns Goodwin couldn’t get away with referring to FDR’s dog as “Fella.” **B**