



The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers

Written by Maxwell King

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The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers

By Maxwell King

The Good Neighbor Cast

The definitive biography of Fred Rogers, children's television pioneer and American cultural icon, an instant New York Times bestseller

The Good Neighbor Book

Fred Rogers (1928–2003) was an enormously influential figure in the history of television. As the creator and star of Mister Rogers’s Neighborhood, he was a champion of compassion, equality, and kindness, fiercely devoted to children and taking their questions about the world seriously. *The Good Neighbor* is the first full-length biography of Fred Rogers.

The Good Neighbor Policy

Based on original interviews, oral histories, and archival documents, *The Good Neighbor* traces Rogers's personal, professional, and artistic life through decades of work. It includes his surprising decision to walk away from the show in 1976 to make television for adults, only to return to the neighborhood to help children face complex issues such as divorce, discipline, mistakes, anger, and competition. *The Good Neighbor* is the definitive portrait of a beloved figure.

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The Good Neighbor Mr Rogers

I grew up watching Mister Rogers Neighborhood, and suffice it to say, most Americans who turned five by 2001 probably did as well. My husband watched the program to help him with his English when he first came to this country. Mister Rogers is by all accounts an American icon, so, when I saw on my goodreads feed a few months back that a new biography on Fred Rogers would be published this year, I knew that it was a book I just had to read. The Good Neighbor, written by a longtime Rogers acquaintance I grew up watching Mister Rogers Neighborhood, and suffice it to say, most Americans who turned five by 2001 probably did as well. My husband watched the program to help him with his English when he first came to this country. Mister Rogers is by all accounts an American icon, so, when I saw on my goodreads feed a few months back that a new biography on Fred Rogers would be published this year, I knew that it was a book I just had to read. The Good Neighbor, written by a longtime Rogers acquaintance Maxwell King, allows readers to meet the Fred Rogers from off the air. It was a nostalgic trip, and has become one of the highlights of my reading year.

Fred Rogers grew up as an only child, loved by his parents and grandparents until the age of eleven when his parents adopted a girl who they always wanted. A chubby kid who was often ridiculed by his peers, Rogers turned to a make believe world of puppets to help him get through his childhood. His parents and maternal grandparents had grown wealthy through hard work and achieved their personal American dream, becoming among the wealthiest members of the Latrobe, Pennsylvania community in which they lived. Fred's mother taught both kindness and philanthropy, giving selflessly to all the needy families in their church and outside community. Fred would accompany his mother to New York City each December on trips to buy gifts for the community as well as for his family. Yet, young Fred was still ridiculed at school, sometimes for his appearance, other times for his wealth and he stood out. His parents kept him home for stretches of a time and it was there that he honed his skills as a puppeteer and musician that would feature on his signature children's program many decades later.

Fred Rogers eventually graduated from Rollins College, where he also met his future wife Joanne. The couple both majored in music, with Fred also studying French and maintaining a lifelong correspondence with many of his professors from the school. Fred had desired to go into the ministry but he knew his calling was young children. During the 1950s, the few programs marketed toward children were variety hours as the Howdy Doody Show and Kukla, Fran, and Ollie. While these hours on the new medium of television were fun and upbeat, Fred Rogers envisioned himself ministering to children and their parents through television. Through connections from his grandfather, Rogers gained an internship at fledgling station NBC in New York where he began his professional career; however, as a young college graduate, he was not given space to be creative and eventually moved to a local station in Pittsburgh where for the next decade he would develop behind the scenes a cutting edge program for children, with help from local early education specialists and ministers. This show named the Fred Rogers Hour was the first of its kind and would endure for decades.

Fred Rogers loved all people just the way they were. That was the message he broadcast on his show,

later known as Mister Rogers Neighborhood, for decades. Rogers signature program ran for the better part of four decades. He combined his knowledge of music, puppeteering, early childhood education, and ministry to create a safe place for children from all walks of life. While Rogers's counterpart Sesame Street was considered fast paced and fun, lasting a whole hour, Rogers developed a theme and ran with it for a half hour for an entire week. He spent hours in writing and meeting with the production team to develop each show, his work often lasting an entire day. Rogers discussed themes as divorce, death of a loved one or pet, childhood disability, and interracial relationships at a time when these topics were not discussed on television in any capacity. Diffusing difficult situations with his puppets in the land of make believe and light hearted songs, Rogers reached the heart of his viewers, making growing up just a little easier for them in the half hour he had with the children each day. While many doubted that Rogers could create a ministry on live television and were reluctant to ordain him, Mister Rogers television persona has endured over multiple generations. It is the safe place for children that at times Fred Rogers himself did not have growing up, which is why it is always a beautiful day in his neighborhood.

During the World Series this year, Fox aired a commercial for Pixel 3 featuring a Fred Rogers voice over having his question how the world works. It was told through the eyes of a child and was a refreshing breath of fresh air in this world we now live in that is connected by media and a twenty four hour news cycle. What would he make of his program being available on platforms as Netflix and YouTube and phones that take pictures of everything in the flash of an eye. There are times when I want to go to Mister Rogers Neighborhood, to visit the bakery, the library, and discuss life with the mail carrier. Earning the Presidential Medal of Freedom during his lifetime, Fred Rogers's ministry has truly endured, making him an American treasure and an underrated American icon of the 20th century.

5 star read ...more

While I didn't grow up watching Mr Rogers (sadly!), I've since heard so much about him.

This book makes all the more obvious that he was a decent and good man who wanted to bring positive to everyone.

With that said, I can't say this was an "enjoyable read" but it was interesting to learn more about his life and career.

*I don't give ratings to this type of book.

The Good Neighbor Movie

Hello Neighbour! Many of children and adults alike have come to know the wonders of Fred Rogers during a long career in children's education television. Maxwell King seeks to revive an interest in Mr. Rogers and his extensive impact that touched the lives of thousands over a career that spanned six decades. The young Fred Rogers was quite introverted and bullied, choosing to hide away in his family's third floor home, where he had his own puppet theatre. King writes of how Rogers would use his time with puppets to work out many of his emotions, away from those who may judge or mock him. Rogers was an attentive student and did well in school, but had trouble finding his niche in college. It was only when he travelled to Florida that Rogers was able to complete a degree in music that he felt himself completely satisfied, especially since it was there that he met his wife. Returning to Pittsburgh, Rogers discovered the new medium of television and noticed just how horrible it was, lacking anything substantial for children. Thus began Rogers's lifelong mission, to create children's programming that would educate and entertain in equal measure. Rogers moved to New York with his new wife to hone his skills as he worked for NBC. He learned some of the tricks of the trade while also discovering many of the pitfalls of trying to develop programming. King explores how Rogers discovered the importance of speaking directly to the child through the television, creating a one-on-one relationship to better connect and deliver his message. When WQED came calling, Rogers returned to Pittsburgh to help the start-up network with some of its early programming. Rogers began honing his need to speak to children at their level, linguistically and emotionally, even when his ideas clashed with those of his collaborators and bosses. Rogers used puppets and wrote many of the songs used on screen to communicate with children and foster a passion. King explores a brief sojourn to Canada for the Rogers family, where Fred worked with the CBC to develop Mr. Rogers, the precursor to his highly successful program. While Rogers did enjoy some aspects of his time in Canada, there were also a number of issues with his young boys that helps push Rogers to return to Pittsburgh, though he had no job prospects. It was only through hard work and dedication that Fred Rogers could sell his Mr. Rogers idea to WQED in an expanded format. Rogers was able to do so, particularly with the backing of eminent child developmental psychologist Dr. Margaret McFarland, as well as Dr. Benjamin Spock and Erik Erikson. Pittsburgh was rife with talent and academic genius in the mid-1960s from which Rogers could easily pluck new and exciting ideas. As King reiterates throughout, Rogers sought their advice when he launched Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood and throughout much of his time on the air. The show sought to captivate children from 2-5 years of age with simple to digest themes, but never shied away from reality, choosing not to shield children from topics that would affect them, as long as they were presented appropriately. This overarching theme endeared Rogers to many children (and their families) as he pushed to let the child learn in concepts they could understand at a slower pace. King spends chapters exploring the progress that Rogers made with his staple programming, including when he

hung up his sneakers and cardigan for a time in the mid-70s. While Rogers took up seminary studies and was an ordained Presbyterian minister, he chose never to instill his Christian views or many of his social sentiments in shows, hosting Christmas specials but adding that there are many ways that people celebrate. From life on the house set to the World of Make-Believe, Fred Rogers was constantly trying to help children through themes—both subtle and blatant—that would help them grow. From death to divorce, machines to music, Fred Rogers brought the word to children, one 28 minute episode at a time, loving each viewer just the way they were. Brilliantly written in ways that touched my heart and brought back so many memories. Maxwell King ignites memories of childhood that bring a warm and fuzzy feeling. Highly recommended for anyone who wants a stroll down memory lane, as well as the reader who wishes to hear all about the inner workings of a great children's educator.

I could not wait to get my hands on this book. As soon as I started, I knew I would be pulled into my early childhood years, taking back to time sitting around the television. Maxwell King effectively tells the story of Fred Rogers and how he changed the lives of so many children by passionately listening to them and not being afraid to ask others for help. He chose not to take a condescending approach, but advocated for the child from their perspective, rather than using his name recognition to force change upon society. Fred Rogers grew up in wealth, but did not use this to his advantage, choosing instead to amass riches in the joy he brought to others. King writes in such a fluid manner that the reader is soon lost in the narrative and is learning at every flip of the page. King spares no detail in recounting the life events that made Fred Rogers a success, but also chose key events in his life to better understand the arc Rogers made in public broadcasting and the rights of the child to learn without distraction of advertisement, violence, or flashy gimmicks. As King reiterates throughout, Rogers required a slower pace and smooth delivery to show children that their pace was the right pace to learn, but also chose to include follies into his program, underlining the fact that perfection is not part of the learning experience. Maxwell King has done much research, pulling out countless interviews, archived clips of shows, and pieces written about Fred Rogers throughout his life, all to develop this well-rounded biography of a man who quietly took hold on the North American television market from the late 1950s through to 2003. As King writes, wherever Fred Rogers went, he was swarmed by happy toddlers and young children. He was happy to stop and talk to these children, be it in his own voice or that of one of the many puppets he brought to life on the show. Do stop in the next time you are in the Neighborhood or take Trolley if you feel you need a little extra direction. I know I will!

Kudos, Mr. King, for this sensational piece. I found myself tearing up numerous times as I remembered moments from my childhood that were shaped by Fred Rogers. He will be missed, but your book breathed new and exhilarating life into him.

Love/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

A Book for All Seasons, a different sort of Book Challenge: <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>
...more

I recently saw the documentary *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* and absolutely loved it. Like weeping in the middle of a crowded theater type of love which kinda caught me off guard because although I watched Mister Rogers' Neighborhood growing up, it wasn't exactly must see tv for me. But learning more about this man and how much good he put into the world, just really brought up all these emotions in me. While the film focused primarily on the tv show, this book is the definitive Fred Rogers biography. I recently saw the documentary *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* and absolutely loved it. Like weeping in the middle of a crowded theater type of love which kinda caught me off guard because although I watched Mister Rogers' Neighborhood growing up, it wasn't exactly must see tv for me. But learning more about this man and how much good he put into the world, just really brought up all these emotions in me. While the film focused primarily on the tv show, this book is the definitive Fred Rogers biography to date. I was happy to learn more about his childhood and what events and people helped shape him into such a special man. And yes, I teared up reading this book as well.

This is definitely a very thorough biography as it explores his childhood, education, the family he raised with his wife, and of course his career. There were two things that really stood out to me in particular. The first being he came from a family that was very wealthy but incredibly generous to friends, employees, and other people in need. For sure being raised in that type of environment ended up having a positive effect on him and the type of man he became. The second thing I found interesting in the book was the talk about *Sesame Street*. I guess I never really had thought about it before how the two shows had very different styles and how because *Sesame Street* is marketed in a different way, it probably will have the more enduring legacy.

Overall, I was very pleased with this biography. As is mentioned in the book, you aren't going to find any dirt on Fred. I think the most that can be said about him is he was passionate about his work which might have led to some disagreements. He really was just a good man. A man who might have come across as very simple but put a tremendous amount of effort and thought into everything he did. As he is famous for saying, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.". Thank you Mr. Rogers for always being a helper!

...more

The Good Neighbor Review

I was anxious to read this biography as my older kids really grew up with Mr. Rodgers and I admire him as a person and role model. However the writing in this biography is so mediocre and repetitive that I just can't finish. It's a shame because this could have been so much better.

So DNF for me at 60%

I never watched a ton of Mister Roger's Neighborhood growing up (I was more of an Arthur and Goosebumps type of kid and I lost TV access when I was in the third grade, haven't had cable, satellite or streaming since), but it's impossible not to recognize this endearing guy. More than just a famous TV show host, Fred Rogers truly did care about his viewers by all accounts, and in an unfortunate age of the scandals of Bill Cosby and the illegal stunts of Justin Bieber, it's great to read a story about a public figure who's above all that and enjoyed what he did. Sadly he passed away, but Fred Rogers was a role model for generations of children, and he never patronized them. His show never shied away from difficult issues such as disabilities, 9/11's terrorist attacks or bullying, but it was always explained in a way that both children and adults alike could understand.

The Good Neighbor is one of the best biographies I've read in a long time. I had no idea about much of Mr. Roger's family history or childhood, but author Maxwell King shares it all and it really builds up an unforgettable and lovable character profile. What led to this man being so influential in the homes of millions of families is something that can't be entirely explained by words alone, but The Good Neighbor does capture the essence of it very well. Some bizarre conspiracy theories and tabloid rumors about Mr. Rogers are also thankfully shot down, but with plenty of good-natured humor.

I know a lot of people do make fun of Mister Rogers and his show as being "dorky", but some of his advice doesn't just limit itself to kids and it can't be denied that his words of wisdom and respect towards others are timeless and just as important for adults. There's never been another public figure quite like him in our time, but hopefully this book will be an inspiration to readers, and anybody in general for that matter, to make differences in their own neighbourhoods and leave a legacy of compassion, education and understanding. The world could use a lot more of that. ...more

The Good Neighbor Trailer

Paul says heâ€™s not even married to me...haha...

Because Iâ€™m sooo mean!

But... he didnâ€™t exactly like this book either.

Weâ€™ve been listening to the audiobook together and I quit....I canâ€™t take anymore.

Iâ€™ve had enough talk about how Fredâ€™s wealthy family was not pretentious. Itâ€™s pretty easy not to be pretentious when you have a cook, a driver, a housekeeper, and a 2nd house in nantucket.

Yep...Fredâ€™s family were good- kind- humble -down to earth good neighborhoods!

I get it! Yippy!

Really... wonder Paul says heâ€™s not even married to me...haha...

Because Iâ€™m sooo mean!

But... he didnâ€™t exactly like this book either.

Weâ€™ve been listening to the audiobook together and I quit....I canâ€™t take anymore.

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Yep...Fredâ€™s family were good- kind- humble -down to earth good neighborhoods!

I get it! Yippy!

Really... wonderful and all that jazz....

But....

I wasnâ€™t a fan of the show. I never sat still to watch an entire show. It looked so flat and boring....

My kids didnâ€™t tune in to Mr. Sweater man either

However... Fred Rogers made a great difference to many....

He was kind - and deeply respectful of children.

Great... I mean it: TERRIFIC!

Doesnâ€™t mean I have to enjoy the book...

I canâ€™t tell you how bored I was!

Iâ€™ll go see Tommy Hanks - my High School boyfriend ... haha....play the role. Itâ€™s gotta be better than this book!

...more

I admit I was skeptical, but this was as substantive and wholesome a biography as I could have asked

for.

If there is one 'takeaway', if any, it is how much Fred Rogers cared about the work of educating children. He paid for his early programs himself, and he steadfastly refused to license any merchandise. He kept an extensive correspondence with the educational psychologists and teachers of his day, and the section which analyzes how he frames a sentence was a brilliant illustration of his tech I admit I was skeptical, but this was as substantive and wholesome a biography as I could have asked for.

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The Good Neighbor Ending

I really want to like this but IT NEEDS AN EDITOR SO BAD. I do not need to hear six times, in six different contexts, about how Fred stayed in an air conditioned room all summer one summer because his asthma was so bad.

I'm still reading it, because I want to know more. But I really hope there's a little more editing prior to the actual publication date....OR IS THIS JUST HOW AVERAGE ADULT NONFICTION READS? I have been spoiled by the likes of the 57 Bus and Vincent and Theo.

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news,” Rogers had told his young viewers, “my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of disaster, I remember my mother's words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers — so many caring people in this world.” Yes, there are. Fred Rogers was proof of that. A man born with privileged demographics along with considerable family wealth, Rogers was free to explore any calling that spoke to him. What a gift to the world that he chose to use this incredible opportunity to teach, help and empower. Let Mister Rogers be an example to us all.

In *The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers*, author Maxwell King did an enormous amount of research to provide a well-rounded biography. It not only showcases Rogers's beautiful human qualities, but also his family history, his educational pursuits and what inspired them, the business end of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood and other televised programs, examples of how his sensitivity was both a blessing and curse, and even a section where rumors are debunked about Rogers, such as tattoo sleeves, military service, etc.

Admittedly, when I saw the audiobook was over 14 hours long, I almost skipped over this title, but later that day I had an encounter with a person in which the above quote was referenced and I took it as a sign. His words and example still make an impact, and learning about this man left me feeling nostalgic and humbled.

“What a difference one person can make in the life of another.”

****Bonus: Audiobook narrated by LeVar Burton!**

My favorite quote:

The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers

“Whenever a great tragedy strikes—war, famine, mass shootings, or even an outbreak of populist rage—millions of people turn to Fred's messages about life. Then the web is filled with his words and images. With fascinating frequency, his written messages and video clips surge across the internet, reaching hundreds of thousands of people who, confronted with a tough issue or an ominous development, open themselves to Rogers's messages of quiet contemplation, of simplicity, of active listening and the practice of human kindness.”

...more

The Good Neighbor Next Door Program

First things first, I listened to the audiobook- which is narrated by LaVar Burton (of Reading Rainbow fame) so that was immediately exciting.

Second my biggest complaint has less to do with Roger's story and more to do with the author of this story. The book is needlessly repetitive, almost as if the author wanted the book to be longer than it needed to be. Several times as the listener I am told the SAME THING. I found this disappointing because it took away from the narrative of Fred Rogers li First things first, I listened to the audiobook- which is narrated by LaVar Burton (of Reading Rainbow fame) so that was immediately exciting.

Second my biggest complaint has less to do with Roger's story and more to do with the author of this story. The book is needlessly repetitive, almost as if the author wanted the book to be longer than it needed to be. Several times as the listener I am told the SAME THING. I found this disappointing because it took away from the narrative of Fred Rogers life. The drawn out descriptions made it hard to enjoy the rich life of a man who played such an important part in the lives of so many people.

After listening for ten hours, I can't imagine how I would have felt reading the same thing over again.

That aside, this book was full of information I hadn't known before. Rogers journey into the homes and hearts of so many children is one that was full of drive and originality. The man created a bond between many generations in all different kinds of families. His need for inclusive education of children is one that is commendable.

I firmly believe that if more people were life Fred Rogers we would live in a very different world.
...more

What a disappointment.

5 stars for the subject, 1 star for the writing. I tried so hard, but did not finish at 40%.

This was so repetitive it's not even funny. It was like a high school term paper that required 1000 words but the student only needed 500 words. So we get filler. Repeatedly. Sometimes the same statement is repeated 3 times in a single chapter with slightly different wording. Great, yeah we know Fred spent a summer in an air conditioned room because of his asthma. I don't need to hea What a disappointment.

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The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers

summer in an air conditioned room because of his asthma. I don't need to hear it 4 more times.

Rather than having 250 pages of quality material, our author padded this book with unnecessary repetitive drivel to make it 400 pages. I'm looking at you editors. ...more

The Good Neighbor Netflix

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor, won't you be mine, won't you be mine, won't you be my neighbor?

Just hearing this opening line brings back so many wonderful memories for me! Mister Rogers' Neighborhood was one of the shows I used to watch almost religiously back as a child growing up in the 1980s. Even though I moved on to other shows when I became an adult, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood had left such an impression on me that many of the lessons I had learned from the show continue to stay with me even now. I loved so many aspects of the show back then: the songs, the puppets, the adventures, and of course, the gentle soul with the soothing voice who brought everything together for us day in and day out -- yes, Fred Rogers was my childhood hero, the father figure I wish I'd had.

Given the above, it should come as no surprise that when I found out a few months ago about a new biography being published about Fred Rogers' life and his iconic show, I just knew that this was a book I absolutely had to read. I was disappointed when I wasn't able to get my hands on an advance copy prior to publication, but luckily, my library came through for me and I was finally able to secure a copy to read (though only after having to wait several weeks on the "hold" list). Reading this book was quite an emotional experience for me, as it not only brought back many fond memories of the show, it also gave me so much insight into the life of Fred Rogers and the one-of-a-kind person he was. Prior to reading this biography, I had no idea how much effort had gone into producing his show and how every aspect of the production -- from the dialogue to the music to the puppetry, even such things as the length of each episode -- was meticulously thought out. What stood out for me the most though was how genuinely Mister Rogers cared about children and how devoted he was to their education and overall well-being. One of the things that made Fred Rogers truly unique, especially for someone in the world of showbiz, was the fact that "what you saw was what you got" -- meaning that the gentle, kind fatherly figure you saw on the TV screen, he was the exact same way in real life. As Mister Rogers had said in previous interviews, he was neither an actor nor an entertainer, he was always just being himself. It's interesting that back then, his view that children should be respected for who they are and their thoughts and feelings should be respected as well, was actually considered "radical" thought, with some critics likening it to "coddling" children to the point of spoiling them, yet later on, as thoughts on child development evolved and progressed, his viewpoint was actually welcomed, encouraged and even held up as the "gold" standard for how to treat

children.

I will be honest in saying that I find it impossible to sum up the legacy of Fred Rogers and how much he meant to those of us who grew up watching his show, in one biography about his life, regardless of how substantive or thorough that biography is -- which is why, for me, this review is so hard to write because I know I will never be able to give it the justice it deserves. In that sense, this book is a breath of fresh air in that, given the negativity-filled world we live in today, it is a nostalgic reprieve and a reminder of what it means to be a genuinely humble, honest, kind person who truly cared about others. As far as "celebrity" biographies go, this one I would definitely recommend, not because it was particularly well-written (in fact, the writing was actually the worse part of this book to be honest -- the other reviews that mentioned the repetitiveness of the writing were actually spot-on). Rather, this book should be read for its subject matter and, perhaps, as a rare positive boost given the current world we live in today.

...more

I'm not crying! You're the one who's crying!