The Bishops Daughter: A Memoir by Honor Moore

An unsparing portrait of a glamorous but elusive father and his daughters search for the truth about his secret life.—Sylvia Nasar

Paul Moores vocation as an Episcopal priest took him—with his wife Jenny and a family that grew to nine children—from robber-baron wealth to work among the urban poor of postwar America, prominence as an activist bishop in Washington during the Johnson years, leadership in the civil rights and peace movements, and two decades as the bishop of New York. The Bishops Daughter is a daughters story of that complex, visionary man: a chronicle of her turbulent relationship with a father who struggled privately with his sexuality while she openly explored hers, and a searching account of the consequences of sexual secrets. With a depth of questioning that recalls James Carrolls An American Requiem, this memoir engages the reader in the great issues of American life: war, race, family, sexuality, and faith.
Personal Review: The Bishops Daughter: A Memoir by Honor Moore

A number of years ago I read Michael Cunningham's novel Flesh & Blood, a family saga spanning decades. I made a gift or recommended that book to numerous friends. The Bishop's Daughter is also a family saga - though a decidedly different, uniquely individual family. What the two volumes have in common is that they are thoroughly, painfully honest, articulated chronicles of the emotional peaks and valleys of an American family.

At the heart of this masterful work is the relationship of a daughter, eldest of nine siblings and a bigger than life father. Paul Moore was a prince of the Episcopal Church, Bishop of New York and pastor of the Cathedral of Saint John the Devine. Though he came from affluence, he became an activist priest, championing the rights of the poor and disenfranchised, fighting for racial equality and marching with Martin Luther King, Jr. He was important to the LGBT community because he ordained women to the priesthood (openly lesbian women), and passionately preached for acceptance, love and understanding during the worst of the plague years. We also learn that the Bishop was a deeply closeted self loathing homosexual.

Ms. Moore masterfully communicates her own personal story. What she has created is a rich historical document of an era, a family, and a father/daughter relationship based too often on half-truths and deception. In her quest to better understand her father's often aloof emotional nature, she incrementally collects and assembles the fragments of his hidden erotic life until she is finally able to reconcile and bring them together to create an accurate and representational portrait of her father. It is through this process that the author achieves catharsis, and is able to reaffirm her love for him.

There are far too many details and story strands presented in this volume for me to describe here. Ms. Moore's The Bishop's Daughter is a treasure of memories and a memoir to treasure. Buy it, or get thee to a library.

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