

Becoming Eileen

A member of the famed Rockefeller family finds her voice – and a love of Jewish traditions.

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Contributing Writer

Eileen Rockefeller hopes that her presentation at the JCC Jewish Book Fair will include her husband, Paul Growald, who grew up in Kalamazoo and introduced her to the Jewish traditions important to their family.

The presentation, on the morning of Nov. 14, will expand on her new book: *Being a Rockefeller, Becoming Myself: A Memoir* (Blue Rider Press).

“Paul and I have spoken together for the Jewish Funders Network,” Rockefeller says in a phone conversation from her Vermont home. “Given the theme of my upcoming talk — that strong families create strong societies — I believe it will be a more impactful discussion and more useful to people if Paul is able to partner with me.”

The author, the daughter of David and the late Peggy Rockefeller, writes about growing up as the youngest of six children in a celebrated family and then finding her own path through education, friendships and causes she deems important.

One anecdote recalls a student project focusing on Hudson River pollution. It impelled her to pursue meaningful corrective measures by showing the problem to her influential uncles: Nelson, then governor of New York, and Laurence, a longtime conservationist.

Rockefeller, 61, whose text also delves into her parents’ backgrounds and is complemented with photos, comfortably answers questions about her experiences and priorities:

JN: What do you like about the book?

ER: I like that I managed to be true to my voice as well as my family and my stories. I love that my siblings have each seen their own chapters and given me the green light. Some of my favorite stories are in the chapter, “Time for Being,” which describes Paul’s background and how we blended his Jewish traditions with my Rockefeller ones.

JN: Was there one incident that was the final inspiration for you to write the book?

ER: The first inspiration was when our sons went off to college and suddenly I was faced with the empty nest. Having created so much of my identity as a mother, I sat down to write stories of my favorite memories with them.

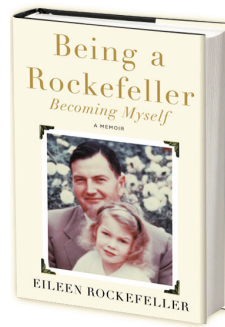
I wrote enough for a book, but it turned out those stories were too close to their childhood to publish. That’s when I chose to go deeper to the origins of my own childhood.

JN: Did you learn anything new about yourself just from the experience of writing?

ER: I learned many new things. One humbling admission was that I couldn’t possibly have done it by myself. I think it’s probably true, as I look back on my life, that anything a person wishes to grow or create that’s larger than the person requires a community of support.



Eileen Rockefeller



Even to grow into oneself requires a community of support because family, our first community, is one that mirrors us but often through distorted lenses. The writing of my book was a process of sorting out which reflections were accurate and which were not.

JN: What are you going to include in your presentation?

ER: I’m definitely going to include how my husband Paul and I blended the Rockefeller and Jewish traditions in raising our children as Jews, how

I [brought Jewish rituals into our home] and how that has affected me personally as well as the raising of our two sons.

JN: How do you react to the experience of being in the public eye?

ER: I have grown enough into my own self that I feel as much a Rockefeller as I do Eileen, and therefore I’m happy to share both aspects of myself in whatever ways can make a difference to others in finding and becoming themselves.

JN: What has been your connection to Michigan in light of your husband’s years in Kalamazoo?

ER: I have not spent much time in Michigan except for visiting Kalamazoo in 1984 [when my in-laws no longer lived there]. At that time, Paul showed me where he had lived in Kalamazoo, and that was great fun.



Paul Growald and Eileen Rockefeller at their 1981 wedding in Seal Harbor, Maine

I visited John Fetzter at the Fetzter Institute there because he became the first funder of my founding of the Institute for the Advancement of Health, and we became great friends.

JN: Have any other members of the Rockefeller family married into Jewish families?

ER: Not all the marriages have lasted, but many of my relatives are married to Jewish people.

JN: Have your relatives joined in the religious celebrations you have had?

ER: Many of them came to our sons’ bar mitzvahs. Adam, 27, works at a strategic branding and design company; Danny, 25, works for an entrepreneur to help scale businesses in technology, communication and sustainability.

Some of my relatives participated in the bar and bat mitzvahs of their [stepchildren]. My sons were the only ones born into the Rockefeller family as the marriage sustained, and they were the only Rockefeller children to have a bar, or bat, mitzvah.

JN: How do you feel about living in Vermont, which has the highest use of state-grown agricultural and livestock products?

ER: My husband and I eat exclusively from our garden. We have an organic garden and grow all of our food with the help of several people who work for us. We freeze and can our foods so that we are literally self-sustaining.

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Jews

Nate Bloom

Special to the Jewish News

Talk-Show Beat

Bravo’s *Inside the Actor’s Studio* returns on Thursday, Nov. 7, at 8 p.m., with an interview with the principal cast of *Arrested Development*. Detroit-born-and-raised host **James Lipton**, 87, has strong ties to the TV series,



Lipton

having played the recurring character Warden Stefan Gentles in 2004 and 2005, and, again, when the series was revived for Netflix last May. Appearing with Lipton are show

creator **Mitch Hurwitz**, 50, as well as cast members **Jessica Walter**, 72, and **Jeffrey Tambor**, 69.

Nov. 3 saw the return of a new season of OWN’s Oprah Winfrey-hosted show *Where Are They Now?* It is currently available for viewing on the OWN website, with guests **Soleil Moon Frye**, 37; singer **Michael Bolton**, 60; and actress **Lynda (Wonder Woman) Carter**.

Frye, whose mother is Jewish, is best known for playing the title role in the hit ’80s TV series *Punky Brewster*. She wed film producer **Jason Goldberg**, 40, in a Jewish ceremony in 1998. The couple have two children, ages 5 and 8, and are now expecting a third child. Frye hosts the OWN D-I-Y show, *Home Simple*.

Bolton had a string of “blue-eyed soul” hits in the ’80s and ’90s. The 62-year-old Carter, who isn’t Jewish, has been married since 1984 to media company exec **Robert Altman**, 65; their now-adult son and daughter were bar/bat mitzvah.

The episode airing at 10 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10, includes professional celebrity **Tori Spelling**, 40. Spelling recently talked to *USA Today* about the big reveal in her new memoir, now in bookstores: She is almost broke, and her husband (they have four kids) cannot even afford to get a vasectomy.

She claims her late father, mega-TV producer **Aaron Spelling**, left her “only” 800K. Her mother, **Candy**, told the paper, “It was much, much, more.”

50 Years Later

The National Geographic Channel joins many other media outlets in marking the 50th anniversary of the death of President John F. Kennedy with an original film, *Killing Kennedy*. It airs at 10 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10.

Rob Lowe plays JFK. **Ginnifer Goodwin**, 35, plays Jacqueline Kennedy. **Michelle Trachtenberg**, 28, plays



Trachtenberg

Oswald’s Russian-born wife, Marina. The actress, whose parents are Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, speaks fluent Russian, which she uses in her film role. □

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bowl. Drizzle with oil, and toss well. Sprinkle spices over, and toss well again. Arrange on the prepared baking sheet. Cook uncovered for 30 minutes. Serve hot, warm or at room temperature.

Makes 8 servings.

ALOO GOBI

There are numerous versions of this traditional Indian dish. Mine is easy and delicious.

2 Tbsp. olive oil
2 cups chopped onion
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped
1 small head cauliflower, the florets and up to 1½ inches of stems chopped
2 lbs. Russet or Idaho potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks
½ cup water
1 Tbsp. fresh ginger, chopped
1 tsp. fresh garlic, minced
½ tsp. ground cumin
2 tsp. ground turmeric
1 Tbsp. garam masala
1 cup fresh cilantro leaves
salt to taste

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onions,

and saute until translucent.

Add remaining ingredients, *except* cilantro and salt, and stir to combine; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer, and cook for 30 minutes. Stir in salt to taste. Stir in half the cilantro, and transfer to a serving dish. Sprinkle remaining cilantro over, and serve.

Makes 8 servings.

HERB-ROASTED PARSNIPS AND CARROTS

2 lbs. parsnips, peeled, cut into 1-inch chunks
2 lbs. carrots cut into 1-inch chunks
¼ cup olive oil
3 Tbsp. fresh rosemary leaves
1 Tbsp. dried parsley
salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Spray two large rimmed baking sheets well with nonstick cooking spray. Set aside.

Toss all ingredients together in a large bowl. Spread vegetables in a single layer on each pan, and roast for about 30-40 minutes, until the vegetables are tender. Combine the vegetables, and adjust salt and pepper to taste. Keep warm until ready to serve.

Makes 8 servings.

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We also grow our own chickens and turkeys.

We're involved personally and give to several organizations locally, helping train farmers and supporting food pantries to bring healthy food to people who don't have the money to buy it.

JN: What do you express through your blog (eileenrockefeller.com)?

ER: The blog is an extension of what's in the book. The categories include environmental preservation, self-health, poetry, reflections on life, the importance of family, the joy of human connections and connections to nature.

JN: Do you still have time to write poetry?

ER: I can't help myself from writing poetry. I've been writing poetry since I was 8 years old. My third-grade spelling and word-study teacher recently sent me two of my poems that she had kept in her files. She strongly recommended that if I write a book of poetry, which I'm planning to do, that I include them.

JN: Are there any new projects you would like to pursue?

ER: I would like to find a way to strengthen families. I mean that in a very broad sense. [No matter how the family is constructed], we need to build back into our culture the value of family enough to support it authentically, helping children in becoming who they are. The future of our country becomes stronger because of the citizens we raise.

JN: How do you relate to readers of all backgrounds?

ER: We all have the task of becoming ourselves, and I share with every reader the feelings of shyness, embarrassment, sadness, loss, happiness and a great deal of gratitude. I feel a lot of gratitude for being able to share my stories with many others in hopes that my stories will find points of connection with them. □

Eileen Rockefeller will speak at the JCC Jewish Book Fair at 10 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 14, at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. www.jccdet.org.

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