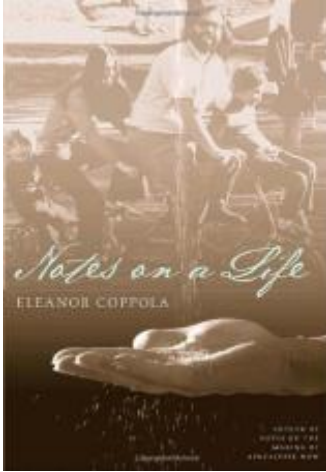

Notes on a Life: A Portrait of a Marriage

by Eleanor Coppola



About the Book

Eleanor Coppola shares her extraordinary life as an artist, filmmaker, wife, and mother in a book that captures the glamour and grit of Hollywood and reveals the private tragedies and joys that tested and strengthened her over the past twenty years.

Her first book, **Notes on the Making of *Apocalypse Now***, was hailed as "one of the most revealing of all first hand looks at the movies" (*Los Angeles Herald Examiner*). And now the author brings the same honesty, insight, and wit to this absorbing account of the next chapters in her life.

In this new work we travel back and forth with her from the swirling center of the film world to the intimate heart of her family. She offers a fascinating look at the vision that drives her husband, Francis Ford Coppola, and describes her daughter Sofia's rise to fame with the film *Lost in Translation*. Even as she visits faraway movie sets and attends parties, she is pulled back to pursue her own art, but is always focused on keeping her family safe. The death of their son Gio in a boating accident in 1986 and her struggle to cope with her grief and anger leads to a moving exploration of her deepest feelings as a woman and a mother.

Written with a quiet strength, Eleanor Coppola's powerful portrait of the conflicting demands of family, love and art is at once very personal and universally resonant.

Discussion Guide

1. Eleanor Coppola often refers to the contradictions within herself, these oppositions are an ongoing theme in her life. Discuss how you see this theme play out throughout **Notes on a Life**. What sort of contradictory characteristics have you encountered in your own experiences?

2. Discuss the various locations to which Eleanor travels with Francis and what effect these settings have on her existence and emotional state. How does filming on location in foreign lands differ from her life at home in Napa Valley? What role does cultural heritage play in shaping the lives of the Coppola family?
3. How does Eleanor react to being thrust into the spotlight when her documentary, *Hearts of Darkness*, receives critical acclaim? How does this compare to her later artistic endeavors? What does this imply about the nature of fame?
4. Discuss the effect of the non-linear narration on your understanding of Eleanor's personal growth? How does her approach to time and memory, perspective and place, enhance the realism of her storytelling? When you look back at your life, do your memories follow a similar pattern?
5. How does the death of her son, Gio, affect Eleanor's outlook on life and mortality? How does this new perspective manifest itself in her life and legacy? Discuss the hope and solace that lives on through Gio's daughter, Gia.
6. What is the significance of the giant oak tree that grows on the Coppola estate in Napa Valley? Discuss in particular the two incidents in which the tree's branch breaks off and the tree completely collapses. How does the illustration of the Niebaum-Coppola Estate, with the great tree towering above, affect you as a reader?
7. Often, Eleanor questions her decisions as a young woman and her role as a wife and mother. How does the nature of womanhood change from her generation to her daughter, Sofia's? Discuss Eleanor's reaction to this paradigm shift and how she reconciles her emotions with her desire to be a supportive mother.
8. How does artistic ambition play a primary role in shaping the lives of the Coppola family? Discuss in particular the ways in which art acts as educator, entertainer, and healer.
9. Discuss the role of Eleanor Coppola as a documentarian and observer of the creative process. How does her approach as a documentary filmmaker compare to her methods as an author of memoirs?
10. Eleanor quotes Tom Waits as saying, "Family and career don't like each other. One is always trying to eat the other. You're always trying to find balance. But one is really useless without the other. What you really want is a sink and a faucet. That's the ideal." How does this relate to Eleanor's struggle to maintain her role as mother, wife, and artist?
11. What repetitions of certain numbers are significant in **Notes on a Life**? How does this culminate with Eleanor's reflection on the death of Gio and birth of Gia?
12. How does Eleanor's installation piece, *Circle of Memory*, help to heal the emotional wounds she has endured in life? What does this imply about the nature of life and death, hope and grief?
13. Discuss the role of the media in molding the image and identity of the famous family. How does Eleanor's place in her own family alter according to the manipulation of the media? Is her role diminished due to the media? How does this seem to affect her personally?

14. In what ways do Francis and Eleanor have opposite views on ambition, travel, and leisure time? As a couple, how do they balance one another emotionally, personally, and artistically?

15. At one point, Eleanor describes Francis's desire to create a new language of cinema to express time and consciousness. Discuss how Eleanor has achieved this goal in her own memoirs. Do your own reminiscences or journal entries possess cinematic traits?

Author Bio

The author of *Notes on the Making of Apocalypse Now*, Eleanor Coppola is an artist and documentary filmmaker. She lives in Napa Valley, California.

Critical Praise

Notes on a Life details the price often paid to attain artistic greatness, and the toll that quest can have on the lives of everyone involved in it. Coppola takes you deeply inside the daily routines, trials, failures and triumphs of an extraordinary family, one that ultimately isn't really all that different from anybody else, regardless of their celebrity status and awards.

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Publication Date: May 6, 2008

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Nan A. Talese

ISBN-10: 0385524994

ISBN-13: 9780385524995