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Century Girl: 100 Years In The Life Of Doris Eaton Travis, Last Living Star Of The Ziegfeld Follies



Synopsis

Lauren Redniss, acclaimed author of the brilliant biography-in-collage *Radioactive*, delivers a stunning visual journey through the life of the last Ziegfeld girl, Doris Eaton Travis. Now in paperback for the first time, *Century Girl* spans the brightest moments in early show business, the major historical landmarks of the 20th century, and the intimate milestones of one woman's long life. Incorporating hundreds of archival photos and personal clippings with inventive line drawings and a compelling, hand-written narrative, *Century Girl* is a more than a biography, more than a graphic novel, and more than an art book "it is a singularly original and major work of art that *Slate* magazine calls "a visually dazzling mélange . . . unlike anything . . . ever seen before" • (Best Books of 2006).

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Customer Reviews

Everything about this vivacious book gives me a thrill. From the life and times of Doris Eaton herself (my latest and greatest role model - Please, God, let me live so long and be so grand!) to Ms. Redniss' swell and funky collaged interpretations of it, these are book dollars well-spent. *Century Girl* is a BIG, juicy tome of a book with a fabulous and sturdy library binding and thick glossy pages. Whether you're a fan of cutting edge book design, collage, the 1920's, or the Ziegfeld Follies, do your coffee or bedside table a sweet favor and grace it with this book before another week passes you by. And don't forget the tables at your Aunties' and your best girlfriends'. This is a book to give anyone you're really crazy about.

This book is an engaging blend of art journal, visual bio, and time-travel archive. Although the book documents the life of a bygone Ziegfeld Folly-dolly, it is really a prime example of how a nearly-forgotten pile of clippings and ephemera can be turned into a fascinating bit of visual magic. The author/artist shows a strong affinity and tenderness for her subject, and yet she breathes new (vibrant) life into the story of Doris Eaton Travis; and creates a fascinating visual diary in the bargain. Although the target audience for this book is probably theatre buffs and historians, I would suggest that many of my "tribe" who love art journals, altered books, and mixed media artwork will find it to be full of ideas. Visually-fascinating and engaging.

Lauren Redniss' *Century Girl* is a work of art that tells the story of a remarkable woman, Doris Eaton Travis. It is visually stunning -- the colors and art/photos/clippings and presentation make the cleverly inked biographical words LIVE on the page. And though longevity is one of the book's hooks -- "100 years in the life..." -- it is really about LIVING life, really, truly living life. It's a very unique experience reading this book -- you open a page and the gorgeous, artistic presentation really draws your eyes. You soak it all in, and then you read the words. As you read the words, you take in the art in a new way, and the words and the art combine to unfold the story in a really wonderful way. I highly recommend this book.

I knew of Doris Eaton Travis because she was the oldest living follies dancer, and because she danced at age 100 on the New Amsterdam stage. (Footage of her dancing can be seen on *Broadway: The American Musical*). As an avid fan of all entertainment from the turn of the century, I was naturally interested in this book. Lauren Redniss uses an artistic, scrap-book style to approach Doris' life, and uses background information, news articles, interviews with her, and photos of her life to paint the picture. The font is the same one they use on the cups at Chipotle, so it looks like scribbly handwriting with different sized letters and wavy lines. It has a lot of information, but it does not go in depth about any one area of Doris' life. It does give some basic background information about Ziegfeld and Arthur Murray for those that don't already know so it is a good introductory book. Maybe now that Doris has passed, a more complete biography will be written about her life. Until then, this book is great eye candy.

The author took a big chance on writing this fascinating biography in the format of a fact and photo packed scrapbook, as if it was a collection of clippings and photos treasured by the subject herself. The informative text is a personal account of the subject's total life adventure, including intimate

details of her family as well as the behind the scenes history of the Ziegfeld Follies, Vaudeville and Burlesque as it evolved in her lifetime. Like nothing I have ever seen, the story appears as hand-printed letters wrapping and bending to fill every bit of paper between the hand cut-out silhouettes and shapes of the news clippings and historical photos. Large format book with high quality paper, printing and binding.

What an interesting life, and beautiful picture book to memorialize this woman and her incredible show-biz upbringing. Some of the more memorable bits for me are: one sister earning \$5k a week as a head-lining Ziegfeld Girl in about 1920, the menagerie Ziegfeld had in his wild NY apartment(s), she and her siblings and Mom living apart from Dad and the non-showbiz sibs, for years, and how sad that was, and ultimately how many tragic endings in this family, including an unsolved murder of one sister, the oldest sister surviving all her children, and the collecting/hoarding habits that seemed to effect all the seniors in the family.

Lauren Redniss knows that personal stories and historical understanding are conveyed best by appealing to all of our senses. In this ground-breaking biography, she incorporates primary sources such as old photographs and vintage newspaper clippings, along with her original drawings and hand-lettered ribbons of prose, and combines them into a creative collage of wonderful story-telling. It's fun, imaginative, well-researched, and, most importantly, tells Doris Eaton Travis's life story more vividly and memorably than conventional fonts or illustrations ever could. Her more recent book, "Radioactive," is just as imaginative and fascinating, although the Marie Curie story is much more somber and thought-provoking. Both these books will stay with you long after you read them, and will hopefully have a lasting influence on history writing in general.

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