

# PREFACE

Margaret Sanger had the habit of slipping handwritten, undated notes into odd places in her files. One such note reads "My biography will be harder to write than that of Havelock Ellis, because I am not consistent and I have seldom revealed what I really feel or believe."

It has been my fascinating task to search out what Margaret Sanger did feel and believe. The search took me to Mexico, Montana, California, Virginia, England, and many other places, as I sought out every person alive who had known her. At Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, I read the 200 boxes of letters, diaries, and campaign records she had given the college after it awarded her an honorary degree. I read, as well, over 190 boxes of similar material in the Library of Congress in Washington, D C, where her letters are preserved as a record of a great social movement.

Since I knew nothing about her when I began, except that in twenty years she had won a stunning victory in a field where others had tried and failed for centuries, I began my personal interviewing with the most obvious source, her eldest son, Dr. Stuart Sanger. I spent a week in Mazatlán, Mexico, with Dr. Sanger and his wife, Barbara, not only collecting anecdotes, but coming away with permission to read, copy, and quote all his mother's formerly restricted letters and diaries. This privilege unlocked secrets of her private life, which included the story

of her last tragic years, during which she was addicted to Demerol, a drug in its own way as powerful as morphine

Most of the people who could verify her addiction lived in Tucson, Arizona, so it was there that I went next I talked to Drs Roland Murphy and Jackson Pyre, who had tried to wean her from Demerol, to Dorothy MacNamee, Grace Sternberg, "Cricket" Bloom, Robert O'Connor, and Ted Steele, who had been her friends, to Arthur Brown, the architect who had designed her fan-shaped house, and to Jack Spieden, who had sponsored Tucson's first dinner in her honor, a dinner she was too old and ill to attend

In Los Angeles I saw Anna Lifschiz and Florence Rose, her former secretaries, each of whom vied with the other in telling me how much they had adored her, even though she treated them ruthlessly at times They introduced me to a paradox that would be confirmed over and over again people either worshipped Margaret Sanger or couldn't bear her

The writer Robert Allerton Parker told me he disliked Margaret intensely, both because of her tremendous ego and the lies she told When I remonstrated "But look at the admiring letters you wrote her," he answered "You had to write to Margaret Sanger that way "

After that, I went catch-as-catch-can By good luck Joan Sanger Hoppe, daughter of Bill Sanger by his second wife, was living near Northampton, Massachusetts, at the time We had two days of intensive talks before she passed me on to her mother Vidia in Ridgewood, New Jersey And so it went Everyone revealed something new about this extraordinary woman and sent me on to someone else I was told to go to Santa Barbara to find Elizabeth Grew Bacon, an English suffragette who had become an ardent worker for birth control, as well as Lisa Voronoff, who had been Margaret's maid for ten years

Next there were Dr Robert Hepburn, son of Mrs Thomas Hepburn, who had been Margaret's National Legislative Chairman, and Dr Gloria Aitken, daughter of Hannah and Abraham Stone A most unexpected bounty was finding Mrs Edward Griswold, a ninety-year-old woman who was a neighbor of the Sangers in Hastings-on-the-Hudson She was still there, full of memories and tales

I alternated travel with reading in the archives And the more I read, the more I realized how valid Margaret's penciled note had been The letters in the files, especially those to and from Bill Sanger and J Noah Slee, her husbands, showed a woman who had hidden her private

life because it was quite different from her public life—hidden it because, what with society, the Catholic Church, and even the medical profession against her, she would almost surely have failed in her crusade. The letters and diaries also revealed an egocentric woman who had drawn a tight circle around herself into which no rival was allowed to step. And they also revealed her lifelong guilt feelings over her lost daughter Peggy, feelings she could not bring herself to admit to those around her.

In England I received an exclusive picture of H. G. Wells from his sons and had delightful visits with Helen Child, widow of Harold Child, one of Margaret's lovers. I also met Michael Balkwill, son-in-law of Hugh de Selincourt, another lover, and lunched in Oxford with Mrs. Rotha Pears, Hugh's niece.

A great find was Amy MacDonald, wife of Angus Snead MacDonald. Angus was one person about whom the Sanger family knew next to nothing. I had read so many love letters to him, merely addressed as "Dear Angus" or from him signed simply "Your Angus," that for a long time, until I came upon a telegram to him, I did not even know his last name. Then, when I got his name, I had no idea where he could be found. His wife was discovered, after much detective work, in Orange, Virginia, and several weekends with her were a delight. An equally great find was Alexander Sanger, son of Dr. Grant Sanger, Margaret's second son. Alexander had written a long thesis about his grandmother in order to win honors in history at Princeton, a thesis that revealed much of her hidden years as an active member of the far left anarchist group, the Industrial Workers of the World. Best of all, Alexander had photocopied all the issues of Margaret's revolutionary magazine *The Woman Rebel* before they mysteriously disappeared from the New York Public Library. These he graciously recopied for me. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, I met Loraine Campbell, who had traveled with Margaret on the tour that included the sensational Holyoke incident.

Most generous of all were Olive Byrne Richard, the daughter of Margaret's sister Ethel, and Margaret Sanger Marston, Stuart Sanger's daughter. These two women sat with me for uncounted afternoons in my Washington hotel room.

In the end, I found much of what I had been seeking—the as-close-as-possible truth about the woman who did much to solve one of the most vital problems of our century—how to put into women's hands the power to decide when and if they wanted to bear a child.

Finding this truth made me understand why, though she built up so many false images in public, she shattered them in private. She put so much material that was against her own interest in the files, it was as if her Catholic conscience had kept prodding her to say "I can't possibly reveal my personal story while I am alive. But here is that story now, biographer. You tell it for me after I've gone."

This is what I hope I have done

Amherst, Massachusetts, 1978

Note: The misspellings and confused dates in Margaret Sanger's letters and diaries are her own.