

BIOGRAPHY



SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR



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MEMORIES OF A GIRL

CHARACTER: SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

DATES: Paris, 9 January 1908/14 April 1986

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: FRANCE

HISTORICAL PERIOD: 20th century

SUMMARY: Simone was born into an upper middle-class family but due to her grandfather's bankruptcy she is forced into a life of deprivation. From an early age she dreams of becoming a writer, so she reads and studies. After becoming a philosopher, she began to publish her first texts and became a famous important writer.

Simone became a promoter of women's rights.

KEY WORDS: WRITER, PHILOSOPHER, FEMINIST, RIGHTS, WOMEN

GENRE: BIOGRAPHY

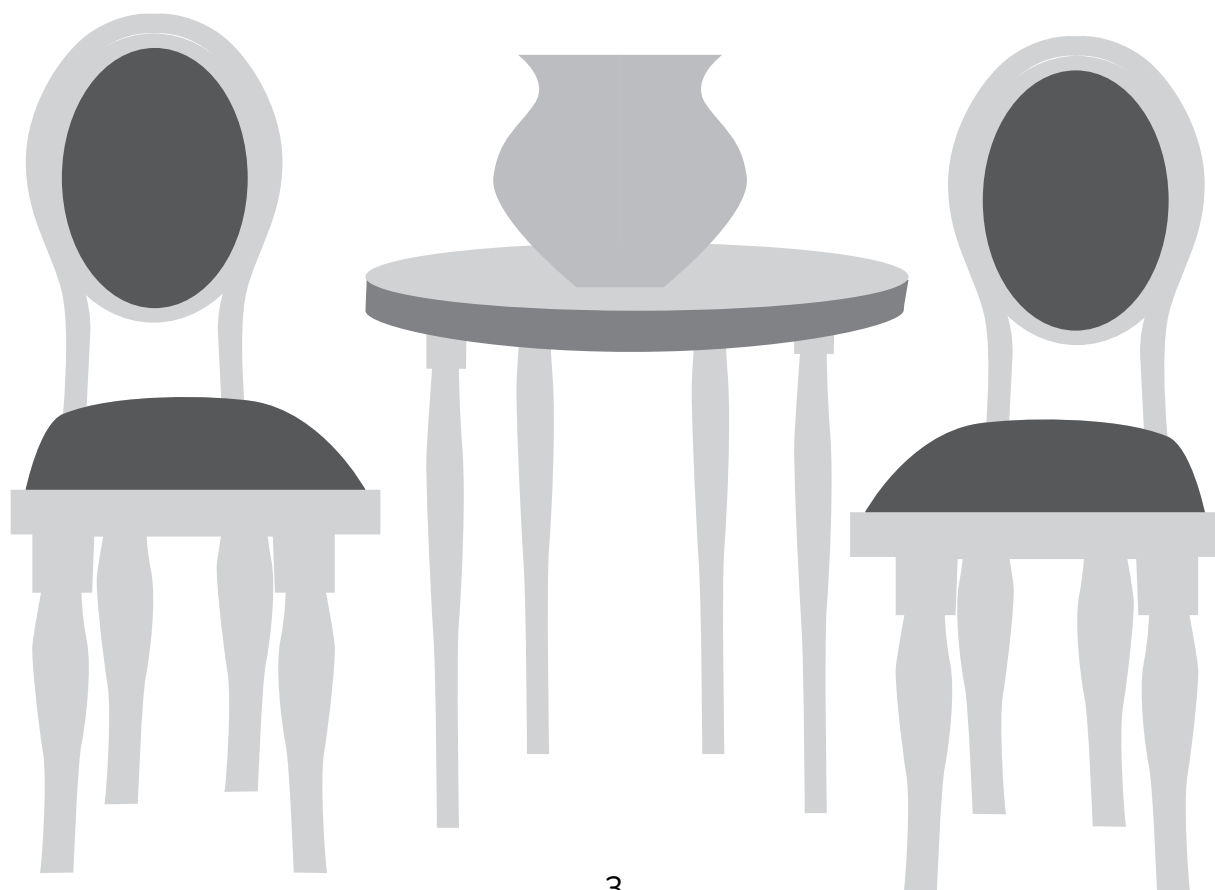
AGE: 9 - 10 YEARS

AUTHOR: Barbara Lachi

NOTE: This story was written inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography "Memoirs of a dutiful daughter".

MEMORIES OF A GIRL

On a cold January day, at four o'clock in the morning, in a room with white lacquered furniture overlooking boulevard Raspail, a street full of elegant buildings, little Simone was born. Everything in the house was neat and tidy and carefully furnished: the doors were decorated with red brocade fabrics, a colour that was also chosen for the carpet and the velvet curtains in her father's study, where Simone often hid. Nanny Lucie took care of her. Her early childhood went by happily, always cheerful, protected and pampered. A few years later, she shared her days and familial love with her new playmate, her little sister Poupette.





Between her mother's feathered ostrich hats and her father's panamas, between long outings and the start of school in a Paris that was changing before her childlike eyes, Simone grew up serenely, feeling loved and at the centre of the world, like a small radiant sun. Lying on the red carpet in front of the large bookcase, she read the children's books borrowed in the family bookshelf. She discovered the fairy tales of Perrault and those of Madame d'Aulnoy, Jules Verne and the Grimm Brothers. The books made her see a world wider and more feral than the reassuring one enclosed within the walls of her home. She devoured them one after the other. They were so captivating and beautiful that she began to think up her own variations.

She modified the plot and wrote small stories herself, which her aunt would recopy in beautiful calligraphy in a yellow notebook.

In the evening, they would read them in the living room in front of the assembled family who praised her.



However, the expulsion from this little earthly paradise in which Simone had lived the first years of her life, was near. First, it was the war and with it came the restrictions: there was no more good food, no more coal with which to keep warm, and the sirens that constantly sounded, announcing the bombings, were a real torment. Then the bankruptcy of the grandfather, on whom the family's entire fortune depended, had dragged all their resources with it...

Simone saw the paradise of her childhood disappear and it already seemed so far away, as the family was forced to leave their beautiful house for a small and modest flat, one in which there was no bathroom, no running water and no heating. Their habits changed, but their parents' rules, however, remained the same.

Their clothes were worn until they were completely worn out, and money for spending was carefully pinned down in a big black book by their mother.

Simone and Poupette imagined themselves as castaways adrift, explorers lost in a vast desert, enduring hunger and thirst.



One day her father, who was very proud of her, told her: “it is important to study, because when you grow up you will have to work. Our situation now does not allow me to give you or your sister a dowry to get married! You will have to support yourselves”. Instead of saddening or worrying her, that idea immediately appealed to Simone. She liked being independent and being able to choose for herself, and she was not at all interested in marriage. One afternoon while washing and drying dishes with her mother, she caught herself observing her and, with her, the lives of the other women, whom she glimpsed through their kitchen windows, intent on scrubbing pots and pans, cleaning vegetables, preparing meals for the day. While the mothers were busy with a thousand household chores, the fathers sat reading the newspaper. For her adult life she wanted something different, an equal relationship in which man and woman had the same rights, value and respect. She imagined a different kind of future for herself and this made her hopeful.



Simone grew and changed. Her body changed, as if it had become clumsy and she did not seem to recognise herself in it; the world changed, its boundaries seemed to be getting tighter and tighter; and the things she believed changed.

If as a child she had been a fervent, devout believer, confessing her non-existent sins even twice a week, at the age of fourteen she decided that God did not exist. Childhood with its security and happiness was now far away and lost and Simone felt restless.

Her new “being” had brought her nothing in return.

During her years of study at school, she thought that she would become a teacher. But one day, playfully answering her friend Zazà’s questions about what her favourite musician was, or her favourite flower she had tried to give elaborated and sophisticated answers, and she had to ponder for a few minutes to the question which flower could best represent her. But when Zazà asked her “What do you want to be when you grow up?”.

Simone replied without hesitation, “A famous writer!”.

The years meanwhile passed and the only certainty for her was her studies and her objective to be a writer, so she enrolled at the Sorbonne University.

There she began taking literature and philosophy courses and in 1929 she met Jean-Paul Sartre, professor and existentialist theorist. For Simone it was like looking at herself reflected in a mirror in which she saw someone who looked like her and at the same time complemented her and felt that it was the same for him.



They began to date, spending a lot of time together arguing, talking philosophy in the cafés of Paris, until after some time, Jean Paul asked her to marry him, but Simone, as she had sworn to herself as a child, answered no. “Our union does not need marriage. We are fine like this, we are two people who have decided to be together, who have chosen each other. Marriage, on the other hand, would take away my freedom to be who I am and to choose you.”



Meanwhile after graduation, Simone, who still needed to earn some money, began teaching and, together with Jean Paul, became politically involved. At that moment, in France, as in the rest of Europe, the situation was becoming increasingly difficult. The German army was marching over neighbouring nations like a horrible centipede, occupying and destroying the territories.

Simone was a child at the time of the Great War, yet she retained a vivid and painful memory of it; she knew that this new war would be even more pitiless. As a child she had been unable to do anything, but this time she was an adult and she decided to make her voice heard by siding with the Resistance, fighting by all means against fascism and Nazism, which were rampant, devouring nations and people.



It was during the war that Simone and Jean Paul founded the magazine “Modern Times”, by which time she had become an established writer who could live off her published books. Her childhood dream had come true, so she decided to leave teaching to devote herself solely to writing.



The war ended but the battles in which Simone wanted to continue fighting, first and foremost to improve the condition of women, did not end. She took to the streets with other women to demonstrate and demand rights for all, to protest against domestic violence, and to support Algerian women.



Simone and Jean Paul travelled across Europe and Russia to gain experience and to meet new people, even important personalities such as Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong. She travelled to Algeria and Cuba for politics and as a reporter, but without stopping to write.

She did not write only novels or short stories but also essays, in which she deepened her thoughts on women, equality and gender equality. Simone did not seek a clash of minds, but instead a meeting on an equal footing.

On a spring day, at the age of seventy-eight, Simone died. She was buried in the Montparnasse cemetery next to Jean Paul's grave, aware that death would not reunite them, but happy to have shared her life with him.

I accept
the great adventure
of being me.

S. de Beauvoir





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