

WESTCHESTER

MAGAZINE

Q&A: Eileen Rockefeller

The heiress whose name is tied to some of our county's most notable places spills about her new book and childhood memories of weekends in Westchester.

By Juliana Brittis



Photos courtesy of Eileen Rockefeller

The journey toward self-discovery can be harrowing as we seek to differentiate ourselves from those who came before us. And with a last name like Rockefeller, the road to distinction is bumpier than usual. As the great-granddaughter of oil tycoon John D.

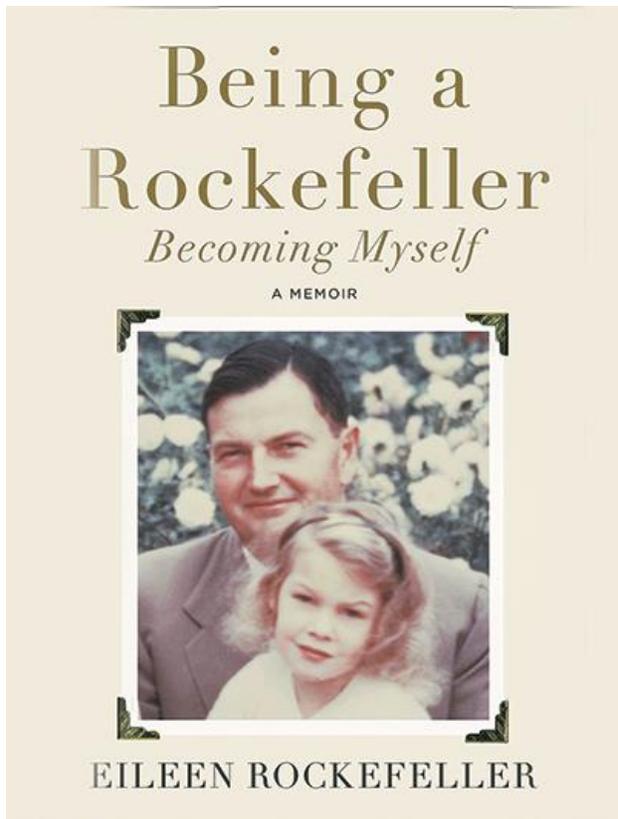
Rockefeller and youngest daughter to David and Peggy, Eileen Rockefeller knows this all too well. It's a story tackled in her memoir, *Being a Rockefeller, Becoming Myself*, where she describes how she learned to differentiate "Eileen" from "Eileen Rockefeller." Though she's now transitioned to a life on an organic farm with her husband in Vermont, as a child, Eileen spent time in Westchester, where she began to develop the interests that led her to become a successful author, public speaker,

venture philanthropist, and social entrepreneur. We sat down with Eileen to talk about her time spent in Westchester and her experience growing up Rockefeller.

Q: Any favorite places, towns, or landmarks from your time spent in Westchester as a child?

A: I grew up spending my weekends at our farmhouse in Tarrytown. I used to ride my horse around Swan Lake on what is now the Rockefeller State Park Preserve in Pocantico Hills. Another special place was Rockwood Hall in Sleepy Hollow; it belonged to my family, and growing up, it was as close as I could get to the Hudson River. There was a huge white oak tree at the base of a hill at my parent's house. George Washington was fabled to have sat under this tree, and it was always a special place for me. When I returned to the estate to visit as an adult, I took a seed from the tree and planted it at my home in Vermont—a symbol that serves as a reminder of my roots in Westchester.

Q: In your book, you mention your time with your father outdoors in Westchester. Have you found your own relationship with nature to be similar to your father's?



A: During our weekends in Tarrytown, I spent hours with my father searching for beetles to add to his collection. During our time together, I developed a love and respect for nature. My father told me, ‘If you know a little about nature, you can know a little about things everywhere around the world.’ His interest in his beetle collection gave him awe and wonder in the natural world and a sense of humility that was passed onto me. I have been able to pass on my father’s respect and love of nature to my two sons. I made sure that when they were growing up, they were able to experience life in both the city and country. Currently, my sons serve on the board of our philanthropic fund dedicated to stemming climate change and supporting a clean energy transition.



A Rockefeller family portrait shows Eileen, farthest right, at age 2.

Q: What was the catalyst for your role as an environmentalist and interest in stemming climate change?

A: I was sent to North Country School, a farm and wilderness boarding school in upstate New York for middle school. Working on the farm with my classmates at North Country taught me a lot about the environment and about the importance of community. The true defining moment for me was after I finished at North Country and was in my senior year at Oldfields School. My

graduation project was a research paper that focused on the pollution of the Hudson River. I had grown up with the Hudson River as a scenic backdrop during my weekends in Westchester, and from my research, I was horrified to learn of its polluted waters. I decided to contact my Uncle Nelson to see if he would be willing to provide any help in protecting the Hudson from further pollution. A year after my first visit to the Hudson, my Uncle Nelson passed a bill to protect the cleanup of the Hudson River.



Q: In your book, you say, ‘I am just as much Eileen as I am Rockefeller.’ What do you hope to contribute to both the Rockefeller legacy and to your personal legacy?

A: I hope my contribution to the family legacy is in helping manifest connections and meaningful relationships across the generations. For my own personal legacy, I hope I can expand the amount of love in the world, because love is the most vital source of creative energy. As we move forward with greater scarcity of resources, we’re going to need an increasing abundance of creativity around solutions.