

November 2008

## Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

Debbie Vaughn

College of Charleston, [vaughnd@cofc.edu](mailto:vaughnd@cofc.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Vaughn, Debbie (2008) "Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 20: Iss. 5, Article 25.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5203>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

# Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

**Column Editor's Note:** Several months following the *First Annual Charleston Conference*, the royal wedding uniting **Prince Charles** and **Lady Diana Spencer** was watched by hundreds of millions of people around the globe. Twenty-eight years have brought significant changes to the British royal landscape (the birth of two princes, the separation and divorce of the heir to the throne, and the tragic death of **Princess Diana**), yet the *Charleston Conference* is still the premier gathering of librarians, publishers, and vendors. While celebrating the success of *Katina's* magnificent conference, check out *Monographic Musings* newcomer **Elaine Robbin's** review of **Diana, Princess of Wales: A Biography**. A part of the *Greenwood Biographies* series, this book joins the line-up of biographies aimed at student researchers that includes subjects from **Langston Hughes** to **Billie Holiday** to **The Notorious B.I.G.**

Born and raised in Charleston, **Elaine** received her MLIS from the *University of South Carolina*. After working at the *Addlestone Library* at the *College of Charleston*, she became a Reference and Instruction Librarian at *The Citadel* where she enjoys the unique environment and the challenge of teaching cadets. A hearty welcome to **Elaine**; and happy reading, everyone! — **DV**

**Gitlin, Martin.** *Diana, Princess of Wales: A Biography*. Greenwood Biographies. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008. 9780313348792. 160 pages. \$35.00.

Reviewed by **Elaine M. Robbins** (Reference and Instruction Librarian, The Citadel) <robbinsel@citadel.edu>

The fascination with one of the world's most photographed, most written about and most media-pursued women is the subject of **Martin Gitlin's** book *Diana, Princess of Wales: A Biography*. Published by **Greenwood Press** and released in hardback April 2008, this 160-page biography tells the story of a child, a young lady, a mother, and eventually an adult woman who grew up in a world of her own contradictions. According to **Gitlin**, she had royal family connections through her family members and through childhood friends (she grew up socially with many members of England's royal family and even knew **Prince Charles** years before they connected romantically); however, she felt

awkward and stifled in the presence of the **Queen** and during many royal appearances as the **Princess of Wales**. According to the biography, **Diana** craved the attention of the media, but resented it when they portrayed her negatively or when her privacy was invaded. In addition, the book depicts the young princess as a humanitarian and one who selflessly participated in charitable endeavors such as visiting AIDS patients and victims of landmines. Subsequently, **Gitlin** also suggests that **Diana** may have used these charitable opportunities to satiate her own desire to be needed and adored.

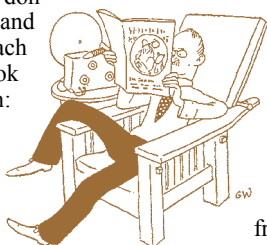


While the intended audience for this book seemingly is middle- or high-school students, portions of the text make bold statements about **Diana's** character that alter (or perhaps enhance) the reader's perception of the **Princess** with neither a scholarly nor objective foundation. For example, **Gitlin** writes, "at an event at the Royal Opera House at Convent Garden two months later, **Diana** tried to spice up her relationship with **Charles** by slipping into a slinky white satin dress and dancing seductively for him" (**Gitlin** 67). While possibly a simple, unthreatening statement, it initially evokes an impression of the **Princess of Wales** as a desperate woman using her sex appeal to impress her husband. The reaction that **Prince Charles** offers is one of embarrassment and indifference. The way the section is written, the reader can almost see **Diana** walk away humiliated and pouting. Is that the way **Diana** was feeling? Is that the reason she wore that dress; and, were those her intentions? Accepting all of these types of assumptions that the author has presented leads the reader confused as to what type of person was she: a self-serving, insecure woman; or, a selfless, confident philanthropist and "fashionista?" Perhaps presenting the life story, the facts, and the background of this iconic figure without presenting some of these minor but exponentially persuasive items would have created a more convincing read. The details presented in the book are intricate and impressive. There are many names to keep track of, but all figures influenced **Diana** in some way; arguably, **Diana** was an impressionable woman. 🌸

## Something to Think About — Losing the Past!

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Serials Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Jack R. Hunt Library) <masse36e@erau.edu>

Some days are worth grieving. Deep in our Special Collections are hidden plastic boxes of aged materials. Each day I edge into the compact storage area to find trails of older titles that originated in the airplane factories of the thirties and forties. Some of the paper is better quality and survives well, while some has turned to brown and is crumbling more each day. I don white cotton gloves and mask, and slowly unfold the pages of each issue until they are flat. I look for bibliographic information: dates, volumes, issue numbers, and the publisher matter so important to a serials cataloger. As I search, the notes increase about supplements,



erratic numbering or dates, the inventory of the almost complete volumes. Creating a new bibliographic record on **OCLC** is the sweet victory of a morning's investigation. As the forensic pathologist finds anomalies so interesting, so I crave the excitement of descriptive innuendos. It is the duty of a cataloger to describe appropriately the information before you, but there is more...much more. Reading the material makes me wonder what the world would be without the resources we acquire, organize, describe and protect. It's not just ink on some old paper! It is history and culture...the answers as to why and how we function in the world. Last week, I ran across information from California that describes **Amelia**

**Earhart's** new plane waiting for her at one of the factories. Another newsletter described how a young factory worker, now in the **Air Force**, was shot down in Europe, and how factory workers in England were able to use a shortwave radio to contact his wife working in his place, and have them talk via radio messages to console each other. Another Midwestern paper was very adamant about training and working their first women in the factory on a trial basis. They were preparing for a possible mass enlistment of its men workers in the future. (Very prophetic for a December 5, 1941 article.) We are able to understand the cultural history of the times through these documents. They were not published to be an archive of information for later generations,

*continued on page 70*