



Ava Helen Pauling: Partner, Activist, Visionary

Mina Carson

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The story of Ava Helen Pauling—her rich career as an activist first for civil rights and liberties, then against nuclear testing, and finally for peace, feminism, and environmental stewardship—is best told in the context of her enduring partnership with her famous husband, Linus Pauling. In this long-awaited first biography of Ava Helen Pauling, Mina Carson reveals the complex and fascinating history behind one of the great love stories of the twentieth century.

Though she began her public career in the shadow of her spouse, Ava Helen soon found herself tugged between her ardor to support Linus in his career and her desire that he embrace the social and political causes she felt passionate about. She believed it was her destiny to accept duties as a mother and homemaker, but neither of those roles was fully satisfying. Her more complete identity emerged over decades, as she evolved as an influential activist.

Ava Helen Pauling's story is significant because so many aspects of it were shared with countless American women of her generation and the generations surrounding her. They had new educational opportunities but were expected to conform to the same limited social roles dictated by the gender ideology of the nineteenth century. When second wave feminism erupted in the 1960s, its force did not come solely from the young women rebelling against their elders' rules and limitations, but also from the frustrated dreams of those elders themselves.

Ava Helen did not experience overt oppression by her husband or community; she even asserted some very non-feminist positions as a young woman. This, combined with a structural lack of opportunity, contributed to the strength and persistence of role expectations in her life. At the same time, she was feisty and willful. Her personality both created her marital loyalty and eventually took her down an openly feminist path.

Ava Helen Pauling: Partner, Activist, Visionary is an important complement to writings about Linus Pauling and a welcome addition to the literature on women's and family history. It will also appeal to students and scholars of peace and reform movements and the social history of science.

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