She was not what one might call pretty. She had little taste for the latest fashion, little time for small talk, but always in perpetual motion to do for others. After all, she was a Kennedy. *Noblesse oblige."

At the top tier of the Kennedy children were Joe Jr. and Jack, Rosemary and Kathleen, “Kick” for short. Joe and Jack, fraternal rivals were gifted with drive that could overtake the world.

Rosemary was the third child and first daughter born into the Kennedy family. Unlike her bright sisters and brothers, she was a severely retarded child. In a prestigious family such as the Kennedys, this was a secret to be kept sacrosanct. No one but the close relatives must know.

Kathleen, vivacious, with personality plus, attracted young men, and she took delight in her ability to charm them.

**Eunice Kennedy**

Eunice was the fifth child and the third daughter born to Rose and Joseph P. Kennedy in 1921. As the granddaughter of John F., “Honey Fitz,” Fitzgerald, the famous mayor of Boston, she inherited her mother’s natural political instincts; from her father, the energy, initiative and drive of a human dynamo.

Eunice stood as the oldest of the second tier of children: The younger set coming after her were Pat, Bobby, Jean, and Teddy. Leadership came naturally to her. It was her very special
style writ large that showed various spellings: simplicity, directness, and immediacy, all in service to others.

For her, leadership emerged from the Kennedy home. Invariably, Mrs. Kennedy would ask Eunice to look after Rosemary and work with her on rudimentary activities. Dutifully compliant, she made certain that Rosie could mingle with others without undue embarrassment to herself or the family; the same held true for conversation beyond the basics.

In a moving article entitled, “My Sister Rosemary,” written in 2009 for “US News“ and “The Guardian,” Eunice shares some of her thoughts about Rosemary: “She learned to dance well enough for Joe and Jack to take her along to parties, but it wasn’t easy when she would say, ‘Why don’t other boys ask me to dance?’ “She loved compliments. Every time I would say, ‘Rose, you have the best teeth and smile in the family, she would smile for hours.”

“Mother was worried about her in London. . . . Would she accidentally do something dangerous when Mother was occupied with some unavoidable official function? Would someone attack her? No one could watch out for Rose all the time, and she was now a grown-up girl. In 1941, when we returned to the U.S., she was not making progress but seemed to go backward.”

When she began to display increasingly assertive and rebellious behavior with violent mood swings, Joe, Sr. agreed to a new neurological procedure for her, a lobotomy, without consulting his wife. It promised to help calm Rosemary’s mood swings and violent outbursts. The gruesome procedure made matters worse, and Rose’s mental capacity was diminished to that of a two-year-old child.

Eunice continues: “My mother found an excellent Catholic institution that specialized in the care of retarded children and adults.” (Extract from Hope for Retarded Children).
“I had enormous respect for Rosie,” Eunice said of her sister. “If I had never met
Rosemary, never known anything about handicapped children, how would I have ever found
out? Nobody accepted them any place.” Through Rosemary’s limitations, Eunice discovered her
ministry, really her style, to spend herself and achieve marvelous things for retarded children
throughout the world. Eunice spoke with authority and used her family name and position to
achieve her purpose. Ultimately, Rosemary was sent to an institution that cared for boys and
girls with mental disabilities. This fact prompted Eunice to spend her life helping retarded
children and adults. Her children have followed in her footsteps. *Noblesse oblige.*

**Academic and Professional Preparation**

Educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Roehampton, London and at the
Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart in Purchase, NY, Eunice graduated from Stanford
University in 1943 with a Bachelor’s degree in sociology. She worked for the Special War
Problems Division of the U.S. State Department and eventually moved to the U.S. Justice
Department as executive secretary for a project dealing with juvenile delinquency.

In 1951, Eunice served as a social worker at the Federal Industrial Institution for Women
before moving to Chicago to work with the House of the Good Shepherd women’s shelter and
the Chicago Juvenile Court. Two years later, she married Sargent Shriver, an attorney, who later
worked in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. He was the driving force behind the
creation of the Peace Corps; the founder of the Job Corps, and the architect of Johnson’s “war on
poverty.” During his service as the U.S. ambassador to France from 1968 to 1970, Eunice made
use of her time and did studies on intellectual disabilities.

**Advocate for the Mentally Retarded**
Among advocates of every kind, Eunice excelled as this country’s advocate for the mentally retarded. In 1962, an exhausted and distressed mother of a retarded child phoned Eunice at her home. No summer camp would accept her child, she said. Eunice responded with largesse by opening her own home as a summer camp, free of charge at Timberlawn, the family estate in Maryland. She would get in the pool and teach the youngsters to swim, loving them as her own children.

**Eunice and Her Brothers**

Eunice’s advocacy for the mentally retarded was overshadowed by the political pursuits of her three brothers, but she far surpassed them as the natural politician. Eunice would have made a fine President of the Unites States. She made it a habit of calling the offices of her famous brothers urging them to another project for the retarded. Teasingly, they dubbed her repeated requests ‘nagging. Yet, they dared not ignore them.

President Kennedy set up research centers on mental retardation. Robert Kennedy inspected squalid state mental institutions, and Sen. Edward Kennedy helped write the Americans with Disabilities Act. “It was extraordinary of her to conceive that she too, could play a role comparable to that of her brothers,” Edward Shorter says, author of *The Kennedy Family and the Story of Mental Retardation*. “Her leadership role would be in the area of mental retardation rather than on the big political stage.”

In 1968, Eunice founded the Special Olympics. Today, they include more than 2.25 million people in 160 countries. “She, in fact, was capable of major achievements helping these kids, and that is what she did. She dedicated her life to it,” writes Shorter.

**Awards**
Among the many awards Eunice Kennedy Shriver received, the most notable are:

1984  Presidential Medal of Honor by Ronald Reagan highest civilian award in U.S.
1990  Eagle Award from the U.S. Sports Academy
1992  Award for Greatest Public Service Benefiting the Disadvantaged
1995  Second American to appear on a U.S. coin while still living
2006  Papal Knighthood and made Dame of the Order of St. Gregory

2009 Smithsonian Institute’s National Portrait Gallery unveiled an historic portrait of her, the first portrait of the NPG has ever commissioned of an individual who had not served as a US President or First Lady.

2010 The State University of New York at Brockport, home of the 1979 Special Olympics, renamed its football stadium after Eunice Shriver. (Awarded posthumously)

Later Years

At 85, Eunice was not about to retire. She pursued her tireless work on the issues concerning those with special needs because, she noted, “in so many countries, the retarded are not accepted in the schools, not accepted in play program, just not accepted. We have so much to do.”

Eunice Kennedy Shriver and her husband were devout Roman Catholics and lifelong Democrats. Staunchly pro-life, Eunice was a member of Feminists for Life. She died in 2009; her husband, in 2011. The epilogue of the Book of Proverbs is a fitting tribute to Eunice Kennedy Shriver, a woman of noble character. Her badge of honor, her very special style? Living and doing for others and thus building a better world.
Proverbs 31:10-31 Epilogue: The Wife of Noble Character

10 A wife of noble character who can find?
   She is worth far more than rubies.
11 Her husband has full confidence in her
   and lacks nothing of value.
12 She brings him good, not harm,
   all the days of her life.
13 She selects wool and flax
   and works with eager hands.
14 She is like the merchant ships,
   bringing her food from afar.
15 She gets up while it is still night;
   she provides food for her family
   and portions for her female servants.
16 She considers a field and buys it;
   out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.
17 She sets about her work vigorously;
   her arms are strong for her tasks.
18 She sees that her trading is profitable,
   and her lamp does not go out at night.
19 In her hand she holds the distaff
   and grasps the spindle with her fingers.
20 She opens her arms to the poor
   and extends her hands to the needy.
21 When it snows, she has no fear for her household;
   for all of them are clothed in scarlet.
22 She makes coverings for her bed;
   she is clothed in fine linen and purple.
23 Her husband is respected at the city gate,
   where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.
24 She makes linen garments and sells them,
   and supplies the merchants with sashes.
25 She is clothed with strength and dignity;
   she can laugh at the days to come.
26 She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

27 She watches over the affairs of her household
    and does not eat the bread of idleness.

28 Her children arise and call her blessed;
    her husband also, and he praises her:

29 “Many women do noble things,
    but you surpass them all.”

30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
    but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

31 Honor her for all that her hands have done,
    and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.