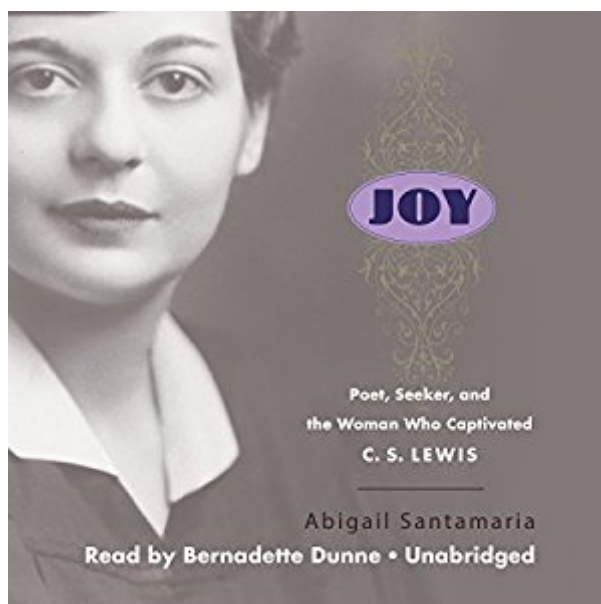


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# Joy: Poet, Seeker, And The Woman Who Captivated C. S. Lewis



## Synopsis

The first full biography of Joy Davidman brings her out from C. S. Lewis' shadow, where she has long been hidden, to reveal a powerful writer and thinker. Joy Davidman is known, if she is known at all, as the wife of C. S. Lewis. Their marriage was immortalized in the film *Shadowlands* and Lewis' memoir, *A Grief Observed*. Now, through extraordinary new documents as well as years of research and interviews, Abigail Santamaria brings Joy Davidman Gresham Lewis to your ears in the fullness and depth she deserves. A poet and radical, Davidman was a frequent contributor to the communist vehicle *New Masses* and an active member of New York literary circles in the 1930s and '40s. Born Jewish in the Bronx, she was an atheist then a practitioner of Dianetics; she converted to Christianity after experiencing a moment of transcendent grace. A mother, a novelist, a vibrant and difficult and intelligent woman, she set off for England in 1952, determined to captivate the man whose work had changed her life. Davidman became the intellectual and spiritual partner Lewis never expected but cherished. She helped him refine his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, and to write his novel *Till We Have Faces*. Their relationship - begun when Joy wrote to Lewis as a religious guide - grew from a dialogue about faith, writing, and poetry into a deep friendship and a timeless love story.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 14 hours and 10 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: August 4, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B012BHYV9K

Best Sellers Rank: #150 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Poetry #512 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Artists, Writers & Musicians #2320 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > United States

## Customer Reviews

In the preface of *JOY*, Abigail Santamaria tells of an incident that occurred during her preliminary research into Joy Davidman's life. Most of the first hand witnesses to Joy's life were either long

dead or in advanced old age, but a few remained to "set the record straight". One of them was the former Ruth Davidman, the first wife of Howard Davidman, Joy's brother. At first, Ruth was hesitant to be interviewed for this project and was leery to be a part of a book that was determined to "perpetuate the myth". Santamaria assured her that she only wanted to write a true account of Joy's life and was prepared to be objective and truthful. This author absolutely lived up to her word and has painted a portrait that is credible but not exactly what fans of CS Lewis and Joy Davidman have come to expect. The book starts with Joy's background - her parents and grandparents story of immigration, hardship and poverty in a new country and how they rose from the lowest rung of society to being involved, educated and contributing citizens of this nation. Then there is the account of Joy's childhood, brilliance and education that prepared her to take a place among the intellectual elite of the early to mid 20th century. All of this is played out in front of a backdrop of a painful longing and searching that kept her restless and unsatisfied - and it was this searching spirit that drove her life - causing her to start out as an idealistic extremist, only to be disappointed and ultimately disillusioned until she had an unexpected Spiritual encounter that completely altered the course of her life. The first half of the book was a bit slow moving, but it was interesting and exactly what I expected.

First, full disclosure: If you were to ask me about my favorite movies, *Shadowlands* would consistently occupy one of the first five places, if not the top spot. I love the story of how beloved Narnia author C. S. Lewis, a confirmed bachelor, found love late in life where he was least expecting it --- with an outspoken Jewish American divorcee named Joy Davidman Gresham. The film, for which Debra Winger received an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Joy, chronicles the couple's brief but profound romance and even briefer marriage, cut short by Joy's death from breast cancer. Most people, if they are familiar with Joy at all, only know her through the fictional movie portrayal or possibly through Lewis' own beautifully written memoir, *A GRIEF OBSERVED*, in part about how Joy's untimely death shook Lewis' strong Christian faith. Abigail Santamaria aims to breathe life into this fascinating woman's biography, showing Joy as an independent free thinker, not just as an accessory to Lewis, which is how she often has been depicted elsewhere. She also portrays Joy as more complicated --- and more flawed --- than in previous accounts, which may surprise many readers. But what emerges is a portrait of a woman at once more human and more alive, despite (or because of?) her shortcomings. Santamaria presents Joy's life as a sort of quest narrative, portraying Joy as a seeker from an early age when, as a precocious young girl, she dreamed of encountering Fairyland and found more comfort at the zoo and botanical gardens than

she did at school, where, thanks to her academic giftedness, she was placed in classes with children much older than herself. Joy took up poetry at an early age, and was often inspired by the heavens and by mythology.

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