

# ANZA PUBLISHING

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**A Profound and Poignant Story of a Life Committed  
To Promoting Justice in an Intolerant Society**

## **HALF A CENTURY**

*The Memoirs of the First Woman  
Journalist in the Civil Rights Struggle*  
**by Jane Swisshelm**

*Jane Swisshelm edited her newspaper with such spirited audacity that she became widely known for her powers of denunciation. “Beware of sister Jane,” contemporary editors said to each other — Dictionary of American Biography*

**HALF A CENTURY** (Bylany Press) is the compelling autobiography of a woman whose name has generally been forgotten, but who helped set the stage for the civil rights activities in the later 19th century. As well as being an activist in the campaign against slavery, Jane Swisshelm also served as a nurse during the Civil War, and became an accomplished newspaper publisher and editor. She was the first woman in America to integrate such diverse positions. Apparently not content with her role as a pioneer, she went further to make her mark, by imbuing her newspapers with a strong moralistic “edginess”.

The life story contained in **HALF A CENTURY** is intriguing, but becomes even more so when put into a historical context. Jane Grey Swisshelm (1815-1884) was born in Pittsburgh to Scotch-Irish Covenanters. She married James Swisshelm at the age of 21, who was a Methodist, but this brought her into conflict with her husband’s family, who did not approve of her own religious beliefs. The beginning of her career was marked by sending incisive and provocative articles to antislavery newspapers. Using the money gained from her mother’s legacy, in 1848 she started her own publication, the Pittsburg Saturday Visiter (the unusual spelling of “Visiter” was deliberate). She expanded the ambit to cover various social, religious and political issues. Her language was so trenchant, that she grudgingly earned the respect of, and some would say instilled fear into, other newspaper editors.

In 1856, Swisshelm began another abolitionist paper, the Democrat. As she delved into public speaking, her attitude became increasingly radical and outspoken. This shift towards confrontationism earned her an unsavory reputation, yet it was a notoriety she relished. Swisshelm’s criticisms ignored the intricacies of ideology and were more preoccupied with denigrating perceived character flaws. Her interpretations of current events made her famous, but eventually caused serious harm to her career and personal life. The breakdown of her marriage was possibly the consequence of her idiosyncratic form of commentary, but her ejection from government service was definitely the result

of it.

The Civil War years not surprisingly brought major changes to Swisshelm's life. Although she originally went to Washington, D.C. to oppose any leniency for those responsible in the Sioux Indian uprising, through various connections she also found work as a nurse in a war hospital. Indeed, a good portion of **HALF A CENTURY** is devoted to her work as a nurse, and here she shows herself at her best, by providing much needed service in one of the most emotionally draining jobs, that of helping wounded and dying soldiers during the Civil War. Her autobiography reveals, with deeply moving and astonishing candor, the powerful feelings she endured during this time. Indeed, the difficulties and absurdities of daily life in the hospital—the seemingly unending stream of casualties, the incompetence of nurses and doctors, the loss of identity and low regard for life that war brings—inspired Swisshelm to write her most incisive commentary. These stories are very affecting, as they portray a netherworld where a peculiar analogue to the "family" spontaneously arose, intimately linking soldiers and staff. While many of the other female nurses were either too detached or scared to provide much emotional involvement, Swisshelm showed tender interest in the welfare of the men, even knowing that after the soldiers left the hospital she would never see them again.

Paul Dennis Sporer (editor) is the author of *The Dimensions of Companionship; Liberating Love; The Concept of Family*; and *Equal but Different*. He has also served as editor on more than 30 culturally and historically significant books, including *Painting Explained*, by Thomas Gullick; *Is Secession Treason?*, by Albert Bledsoe; *The Heart of Aryavarta*, by Lawrence Dundas; *Beauty and Art*; by Aldam Heaton; *The French at Home*, by Albert Rhodes; *From Slave Cabin to Pulpit*, by Peter Randolph; *Newer Ideals of Peace*, by Jane Addams; *Views of Old Europe*, by Bayard Taylor; *Gentle Measures*, by Jacob Abbott; *Parental Influences*, William Bacon; *Finding a Way Out*, by Robert Moton; *The New Birth*, by Austin Phelps; *Tupelo*, by John Hill Aughey; *An Incident of Travel*, Arthur Jerome Eddy; *End of an Era*, by John Sergeant Wise; *The Missionary*, by Samuel Mazzuchelli; *Half a Century*, by Jane Swisselm; *Born Three Times*, by Thomas L. Johnson; *Dark Hollow*, by Anna Katharine Green; and *1492: Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, by Mary Johnston.

For further information about **HALF A CENTURY**, or to arrange an interview with the editor, please contact Cassandra Foxton, [inform@anzapublishing.com](mailto:inform@anzapublishing.com). The publisher's website address is AnzaPublishing.com.

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