

You were definitely ill-prepared. There you were, ready to “take the plunge” and get married, when you suddenly realized you didn’t know a thing about where you were diving. You were in deep already, that’s for sure. Deep pockets (weddings can get out of hand), deep confusion (who are all these people, anyhow?), and deep dismay (do you really know your fiancé?).

But then it was over and you started life together, sink or swim. You’ve been floating along side-by-side ever since.

Now imagine living your married lives with an interested audience of several billion people. Read more in “Barack and Michelle: Portrait of an American Marriage” by Christopher Anderson.

The childhood and early years of Barack and Michelle Obama has been visited and re-visited by many biographers and journalists: she was working for a law firm, he was a law student. She was assigned to be his in-office mentor, he insistently wooed her. That, of course, is how a strong-willed leader-type born in Hawaii ended up married to a strong-willed leader-type born on Chicago’s South Side.

But what most people don’t know are the behind-the-scenes scenes in the marriage of our current President and his wife.

From the time he started college at Columbia University in New York, Barack (Anderson refers to both Obamas by first name) was an easy-going idealist who, perhaps due to his grandparents’ blue-collar background, wanted to “give back” and “change the world”. Michelle shared his views, but was easily irritated by what she saw as irresponsibility. Because Barack eschewed the private sector and doggedly pursued lower-paying employment with higher social returns, the couple struggled with money problems. His absences while pursuing public office made her feel like a single mother. She hated his smoking habit and his messiness. He hated being apart from his family.

They fought.

Though infidelity wasn’t an issue, she was angered when his star started rising and women aggressively flirted with him. He, too, was taken aback by it, but he was focused: he thought he had a shot at the Presidency. She told him that if he didn’t win in 2008, there wouldn’t be a second go at the job...

Being familiar with author Christopher Anderson’s past works, I was surprised that I really didn’t like this book at first. Much of what’s in the first hundred pages of “Barack and Michelle” is a re-hashing of what we already know, including info from Barack Obama’s own books. I didn’t need to read that old news again.

Despite that, though, I began to enjoy Anderson’s take on the lives of the Obamas, as well as their children and surrounding family. In the end, yes, this book reiterates what we already know, but, perhaps because of some teasing “Wow!” tidbits and a few little-known stories, Anderson seems to make it all fresh.

Book review: “Barack and Michelle: Portrait of an American Marriage” by Christopher Anderson

Written by Terri Schlichemeyer

Supporter or detractor, if you long to make sense of the man (and wife) behind the office, pick up this biography. “Barack and Michelle: Portrait of an American Marriage” is a book you’ll enjoy diving into.

“Barack and Michelle: Portrait of an American Marriage” by Christopher Anderson
c.2009, Wm. Morrow | \$25.99 / \$33.99 Canada | 326 pages, includes notes