

# Book Review of Douglas Gresham's *Jack's Life*

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*Jack's Life*, by Douglas Gresham, 2005, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

This biography is a poignant, fascinating view of C.S. Lewis by his stepson, Douglas Gresham. It is unique because it is the only biography written by someone who actually lived with Lewis. Douglas is bright and insightful about Jack's life as well as giving many personal family details not discussed in other works. He provides a window into Lewis's daily life with Warnie (his brother, Warren), Mrs. Moore (the mother of his soldier friend Paddy who died in WWI; Lewis had promised to care for her if Paddy died), Paxford (who helped around the Kilns), and other visitors.

Douglas calls C.S. Lewis "the finest man and best Christian I have ever known. I loved him and deeply cherish his memory" (p.1). Later, commenting on Lewis's death, Douglas says, "He was the finest man I ever knew in my life, and I miss him to this day" (p. 164). This is a powerful testimony by one who lived with Lewis for a number of years.

Here are a few of the many insights Douglas gives in his book, many of which are not found elsewhere:

- As a small boy C.S. Lewis began to call himself "Jacksie" and would answer to nothing else. He took the name from a small dog that he liked that had been tragically run over (p. 2).
- When Jack was hospitalized during WWI for war wounds, the only thing he could keep in his stomach was champagne, so for some time it was the only thing he consumed. "Never again would he willingly drink the stuff" (p. 48).
- When he was wounded, some shrapnel lodged close to his heart but was too close for an operation, so doctors left it there (p. 49).
- He experienced regular nightmares about being back in the trenches (p. 51).
- Before the war, Jack twice failed the Oxford entrance exam in math. After the war, Oxford dropped the requirement. Otherwise, C.S. Lewis likely would not have been able to attend and later work at Oxford. His future would have been different (p.52).
- Jack drove a car to Oxford on their move to The Kilns. However, that was the first and last time he ever attempted to drive (p.70).
- Mrs. Moore treated Jack as her personal slave, and Warren resented her doing so; but Jack put up with it (p.77).

- Fred Paxford had a little private bungalow in the garden and lived there for 33 years doing odd jobs around The Kilns.
- Warnie struggled with alcoholism during much of his later life.
- Jack encouraged Tolkien when publishers were rejecting *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien, on the other hand, tried to discourage Jack from sending *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to any publisher. “In the end, of course, it turned out Jack was right about both books. *The Lord of the Rings* has become the greatest work of fantasy for adults of the last century . . . and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the rest of the Narnian Chronicles have become the greatest children’s fiction” (p. 139).
- Douglas says there were two things that stood out about Jack and Joy’s (Jack’s wife; Douglas’s mother) relationship: “One was how much fun they always had in each other’s company, and the second was how much they loved each other” (p. 154).
- Douglas says about Joy’s death July 13, 1960: “The sensation of emptiness that filled The Kilns when she was gone was so strong that it almost felt solid. . . . It still feels like being hit on the head with a hammer” (p. 157).

All in all, *Jack’s Life* is an illuminating account with a personal feel – like gaining “inside” information from one who truly lived with and knew C.S. Lewis.