



Winston and Clementine

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Public Service](#)

Date : September 18, 2009



Winston and Clementine

I recently finished reading the personal letters of Winston and Clementine Churchill. The letters were written to each other over a period of 56 years and edited by their youngest child, Mary Soames. I confess that I've become obsessed with Churchill since watching a magnificent [HBO movie called *Into the Storm*](#). It is historically accurate and brilliantly written and acted—it has been nominated for several Emmys. Unfortunately it is no longer showing on HBO and so far it isn't available on Netflix. I assume that the movie will never be available at Blockbuster because there is no corresponding video game. I strongly recommend that you watch it whenever it becomes available.

The letters are amazing. They are beautifully written and wonderfully expressive. Churchill's image was as a gruff and determined bulldog, but the letters reveal another side of his personality. Clementine refers to Winston as her "little Puggie Wow" and she is his "Clemmie Cat." They shared a love of politics—she was a helpful advisor and frequently a better judge of people. She also was more liberal and he did not always take her advice, though he respected her judgment



and always listened. Their letters offer a fascinating behind-the-scenes perspective on the major issues and people of their time, especially World War I and II.

It is hard to imagine greater pressure than Churchill must have felt as prime minister in 1940, especially before this country joined the fight. One of my favorite letters involves Clemmie telling Winston that “there is a danger of your being generally disliked by your colleagues & subordinates because of your rough sarcastic & overbearing manner.” She counsels that with his “terrific power you must combine urbanity, kindness and if possible Olympic calm.” Her main concern was that his subordinates would stop taking initiative and generating ideas if his “irascibility & rudeness continued.” It is hard to imagine a better or more helpful partner. This letter and many others by Clementine were designated as “House Post,” which means that she sent them to Winston within their house while they were together. According to their daughter, this was because she didn’t want to bother him while he was working and because she was “not a good arguer.” It was easier for her to present a reasoned case in writing (as is true for most of us) and he paid attention.

The letters are full of Winston’s concerns about whether they would have enough money to pay their expenses. He made most of his money as a writer—magazine articles and books—and he always was working hard on one of his writing projects. Churchill’s many books include a six-volume history of World War II and a four-volume history of the English-speaking peoples. In 1953 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature (not Peace) “for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values.” Churchill also was a gifted oil painter. It gave him great pleasure for most of his adult life and many of his works are collected in major museums for their artistic value. I kept thinking about the letters of John and Abigail Adams and how their honest relationship and steadfast support for one another reminded me of Winston and Clementine. How great that these people wrote and kept letters, and how rare it is today.

