

Chris Walker/Tribune photo

Ari, from left, Rahm and Ezekiel Emanuel at the 1993 inaugural of President Bill Clinton.

Brothers-in-charms

BY KEITH KOENEMAN

Three brothers — Ezekiel, Rahm and Ari Emanuel — each went on to great career accomplishment: Zeke as a bioethicist; Ari as a powerful Hollywood talent agent; and Rahm, of course, as White House chief of staff for President Obama before being elected mayor of Chicago. “What did their mom put in the cereal?” That is the question Ezekiel, or “Zeke,” asks in his new book, “*Brothers Emanuel: A Memoir of an American Family*.”

Before getting to that, however, the book starts out as a classic tale of an immigrant family in America. The maternal grandfather of the Emanuel brothers — Herman Smulevitz — was a Russian Jew who fled his native country as a boy and arrived in the United States in 1912. The 10-year-old was taken in by an uncle who lived in Chicago near Maxwell Street. The Emanuels’ paternal side of the family started out in Russia, immigrated to Palestine and then spent time in Switzerland before coming to America.

After introducing the family’s background, the narrative of *Brothers Emanuel* covers about 25 years. It traces the story of the three brothers from Rahm’s birth in November 1959 through their childhood, high school and college years as well as

the start of each of their respective careers in the 1980s. The memoir paints a picture of a demonstrative family, filled with strong personalities and a zest for living.

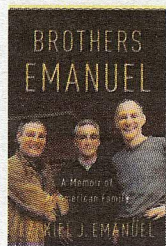
A highlight is the description of the parents of the three—some. Marsha and Benjamin Emanuel — who anchored their marriage in Chicago — had big personalities.

Marsha was passionate about civil rights and racial injustice. She marched in protests and even occasionally got arrested. “I wanted to be a thorn in Daley’s side,” she would later say in recalling her intense feelings about Mayor Richard J. Daley. Her oldest son, Zeke, would recall that

nam. These were not abstractions to us but, rather, personal concerns.” As a parent, Marsha Emanuel also gave her children tremendous freedom and encouraged a fierce independence of both words and actions. Arguing, dropping f-bombs in conversation and even disobedience, were overlooked.

Their father was a physician with kinetic energy and a man who adopted the American Dream with the zeal of the first-generation American that he was. Work hard. Compete. Save your money. Buy a house in the suburbs. Send your kids to good schools. Take in some culture on the weekends. Climb the economic ladder. But there was also something more to Benjamin Emanuel. Zeke would later recall that “my father always has been attractive because of his energy, warmth, charm, and talent for finding some connection with people from all cultures and walks of life. He rarely observed social formalities and niceties — something he has passed on to his boys.”

The Emanuel brotherhood formed early. The trio shared a bedroom, roamed their neighborhoods unsupervised in Chicago and Wilmette, and spent long, edgy summers together in Tel Aviv just after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. They also competed, argued, marched with their



Brothers Emanuel

By Ezekiel J. Emanuel,
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274 pages, \$27

“marching and shouting and getting arrested were a way for our mother to express who she was.” Because of their mother’s passionate political views, the young Emanuel brothers “assumed that everyone took great personal interest in civil rights, the needs of the poor, and the growing American involvement in Viet-

mother in protests and helped one another out when confronted with challenges from outsiders. Constant striving became the pattern of their existence, and competitive success or failure was always measured in relationship to two poles of their existence: the Emanuel brotherhood itself and the praise or scorn of their mother. "The desire for her approval was a powerful motivator," recalled Zeke. "At the deepest level, this anxiety lies behind much of what we have achieved."

Zeke was a good student whom his family pressured to study medicine. Rahm had a talent for "sizing people up and assessing a social situation." He also became a disciplined and accomplished ballet dancer. The youngest brother, Ari, was hyperactive and dyslexic and struggled as a student, but was a talented wrestler. He was also good-looking, charming and a physical brawler who had a teenage gift for starting businesses and making money.

Zeke Emanuel suggests the brothers' later professional success is due to both nature and nurture. He obliquely provides us enough information to figure out the Emanuel recipe for raising children who thrive as adults: First, start with the DNA of a father who has abundant energy and a certain indefinable attractive quality of personality. Next, add a mother full of passion, but who is never quite satisfied. Simmer in a childhood filled with unsupervised freedom, ardent verbal exchanges and brotherly companionship. Put the dish aside and let marinate until the adult versions of your children become filled with an impulse for constant striving.

"Brothers Emanuel" is a fascinating topic that will draw readers in, and Zeke's narrative voice is marked by a tone that appears to be honest and direct. Its subtle passion is appealing.

On the flip side, the memoir has a bit of an uneven, episodic quality at times. There is also no prologue. The reader must therefore gradually develop his or her own framework for understanding how the upbringing of the Emanuel brothers influenced their accomplishments.

People who grew up in Chicago or the suburbs, especially those who came of age in the late 1970s or in the 1980s, will enjoy this book. Political junkies will, too, particularly those who have followed the career of Rahm Emanuel as he made his way from the Clinton and Obama administrations to his current position as mayor of Chicago. The memoir also may appeal to those who track the goings-on of Hollywood, where Ari Emanuel has become a major force.

Those who love memoirs and multi-generational biographies may well find pleasure in the sometimes wistful, sometimes blunt story of how one family made its way from Russia to Palestine, and then on to some of the highest pinnacles of power and success in America.

Keith Koeneman is the author of the forthcoming book "First Son: The Biography of Richard M. Daley."

More Rahm

Want to know more about Chicago's mayor? Here are a few books that offer insight into Rahm Emanuel.

The Price of Politics by Bob Woodward (2012)

Portrays Emanuel as a man with "killer political instincts" guiding an inexperienced president through the maze of Washington politics.

The Obamas by Jodi Kantor (2012)

Book on nation's First Couple depicts tension between Michelle Obama and chief of staff Rahm Emanuel.

Golden: How Rod Blagojevich Talked Himself Out of the Governor's Office and Into Prison by Jeff Coen and John Chase (2012)

Two Chicago Tribune reporters narrate how Emanuel swam in the same Chicago political waters as the former governor.

Obama's Last Stand by Glenn Thrush (2012)

Insider look at Obama's 2012 re-election campaign that shows Emanuel possessing shrewder political instincts than the Democratic president.

Pennsylvania Avenue: Profiles in Backroom Power by John Harwood and Gerald Seib (2009)

D.C. insiders paint a picture of Emanuel as a smart, aggressive "boy-wonder politico" who knows how to win.

The Plan: Big Ideas for Change in America by Rahm Emanuel and Bruce Reed (2009)

Veterans of the Clinton White House present an agenda for a new social contract that includes universal college access and a return to fiscal responsibility.

The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House by John F. Harris (2006)

Excellent book on Bill Clinton that shows Emanuel as an astute, tough and loyal advisor.

The Thumpin': How Rahm Emanuel and the Democrats Learned to be Ruthless and Ended the Republican Revolution by Naftali Bendavid (2007)

Tells the story of how Emanuel, as head of the 2006 Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, delivered a shelacking to the Republicans, helping the Democrats pick up 31 seats in the House of Representatives.

The F*ing Epic Twitter Quest of @MayorEmanuel (2011)**

A funny book that compiled the fake Twitter postings of an Emanuel imposter during the 2011 mayoral race in Chicago.