"The Life and Times of Jimmy Carter"

This collection consists of books written by former President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter. It also includes a series of biographies of the 39th president and his wife.
My maternal grandparents are “yellow dog” Democrats from rural Middle Tennessee and have remained staunch Democrats even as the South became increasingly Republican in the past few decades. Of all the Democrats they supported, my grandparents held a special place in their heart for our 39th President, Jimmy Carter. Perhaps they related to Carter by growing up in a small, rural town like Plains, Georgia in the Depression years. Maybe they found common ground in the similarity of their faiths, Carter as a committed Southern Baptist and my grandparents as longtime members of the Churches of Christ. In conversations around the dinner table, my grandmother would repeat a common sentiment that some hold about Carter, “He was too good a man to be president.” My grandparents’ love of President Carter seemed interesting to me because my understanding of him did not really extend beyond the hostage crisis, long gas lines, stagflation, and teaching Sunday School.

In March 2006, we celebrated my grandfather’s eightieth birthday with a large party on a Saturday evening. However, he did not receive his most exciting gift at his party because my grandparents and I were leaving about 2:00am Sunday morning to begin a long drive to Plains, Georgia for a 3-4 day trip touring historic sites in Georgia, mainly those involving Carter. When I was younger, my grandparents would take me with them on their small vacations to Gatlinburg, Tennessee and elsewhere, so this trip was an opportunity for me to give them a vacation since they could not drive anywhere outside of town anymore. The reason we had to leave so early that Sunday morning is so that we could attend President Carter’s Sunday School class that morning at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, a congregation that split from Plains Baptist Church during Carter’s presidency over the issue of racial integration. After worship that morning, my grandparents and I had our pictures taken with the Carters separately. My grandfather went on for days about how Rosalynn held his hand during the photograph. During our trip, we visited
Carter's boyhood home in Archery, the train depot/1976 Carter campaign headquarters in Plains, the Andersonville Civil War prison, Franklin Roosevelt's "Little White House" in Warm Springs, the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Site in Atlanta, and the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum in Atlanta. Along the way, I bought several books about Carter that formed the initial nucleus of this collection.

Not only did that trip mark the beginning of my book collection, "The Life and Times of Jimmy Carter," but it also served as a springboard for my decision to switch career paths from being a high school history teacher to attending graduate school for my PhD in history. Not surprisingly, my dissertation topic would revolve around President Carter. After reading the books about Carter that I acquired in Georgia, I began to purchase more through Amazon and other online vendors. Since moving to Arizona, I have increased the size of this collection by buying books online, on research trips to the Carter Library in Atlanta, and through local booksellers. I have a signed copy of We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land that the former president signed at a book signing at Changing Hands Bookstore in Tempe.

This collection, "The Life and Times of Jimmy Carter," consists of books written by the former president or first lady and biographies of them. While I have many other Carter-related books on a range of topics including foreign policy, governing style, anti-Carter polemics, and administration officials' memoirs, I chose to only include the list of books by the Carters or biographies because it kept the scope of this collection more focused. President Carter's books demonstrate the vast array of his interests and include many genres such as memoirs, foreign policy, inspirational, self-help, fiction, poetry, history, and children's literature.

In my dissertation, I am studying Carter and the way he and his administration handled conflicts with religious nationalists such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the emergence of
the Christian Right in the United States. Since Carter’s own religious convictions come into consideration in this study, this book collection is critical to my research in revealing the ways in which Carter’s beliefs shaped his decision making and the worldview through which he perceived the events of the world. Carter’s own writings contain some useful insights and anecdotes while the scholarly biographies add different interpretations and details from family and friends that Carter himself might not otherwise disclose in his books.

My interest in Carter that spawned this wide-ranging book collection resulted from that trip to Plains with my grandparents as well as my own identification with Carter, especially in faith-related matters. When so many observers equate the term “evangelical” with political issues like abortion and same-sex marriage, Carter breaks the mold and offers an alternative image with his devotion to social justice, environmentalism, and peacemaking. Not only did Carter challenge the contemporary model of evangelicalism, he tried (but ultimately failed) to reorient US foreign policy toward human rights and away from reactionary anticommunism. Carter’s childhood, political life, and post-presidential career is a story of a complex man who some proclaim was “too good a man to be president,” but who was very ambitious and had his fair share of flaws. This book collection represents all these phases and all the complexity in the life and times of Jimmy Carter.