

# The Enchanting Life of Polly Adler: Icon of the Jazz Age



In the heart of the roaring twenties, amidst the glitz and glamour of the Jazz Age, there emerged an enigmatic figure whose name would forever be etched in the annals of New York City nightlife: Polly Adler. A woman of

beauty, wit, and undeniable charisma, she reigned supreme as the "Queen of the Speakeasies," navigating the underground world of illegal liquor and illicit entertainment with an uncanny ability to captivate and command respect.

Born in 1898 into a modest family in Minsk, Russia, Polly Adler arrived in the United States at the tender age of 14. Her early life was marked by struggle and adversity. She eked out a living as a seamstress and factory worker, but her entrepreneurial spirit and unwavering determination burned brightly within her.



## Madam: The Biography of Polly Adler, Icon of the Jazz

**Age** by Debby Applegate

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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As the tumult of the First World War subsided, the United States entered a period of unparalleled economic prosperity. The country was awash in a newfound sense of freedom and indulgence, and the speakeasies of New York City became the epicenters of this hedonistic era. These clandestine establishments, hidden behind unassuming facades, served as havens for the city's elite to indulge in forbidden pleasures.

It was in this vibrant and volatile environment that Polly Adler found her calling. With an astute understanding of human desire and a natural ability to connect with people, she opened her first speakeasy in 1921. Located in a discreet townhouse on West 54th Street, her establishment quickly became a favorite haunt for celebrities, socialites, and the literati of the day.

As her reputation grew, Polly Adler's speakeasies multiplied. She opened a string of opulent establishments in prime locations throughout the city, including the infamous "Polly's Place" on 49th Street, which became a legendary gathering spot for Harlem Renaissance luminaries such as Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, and Cab Calloway.

Polly Adler's speakeasies were more than just places to drink and dance. They were sanctuaries where societal norms were suspended and creativity flourished. In her establishments, women could smoke, wear revealing clothing, and enjoy a degree of freedom that was otherwise denied to them. Intellectuals and artists found a space to exchange ideas and push the boundaries of artistic expression.

But Polly Adler's success did not come without its risks. The Prohibition era was a time of intense law enforcement, and speakeasies were constantly under the threat of raids. Adler faced numerous arrests and fines, but she refused to be deterred. With a combination of cunning and charm, she managed to evade serious prosecution and continue her operations.

As the Jazz Age reached its peak, Polly Adler became a symbol of the era's unbridled hedonism and glamour. She was featured in countless newspaper articles and magazine profiles, and her name became synonymous with the nightlife of New York City. Her speakeasies were the

talk of the town, and celebrities clamored for invitations to her exclusive parties.

But beneath the flamboyant exterior, there was a shrewd businesswoman with a keen understanding of the human psyche. Polly Adler had an uncanny ability to anticipate the needs and desires of her clientele, and she tailored her establishments accordingly. She created a welcoming and luxurious atmosphere where guests felt valued and catered to. Her staff was known for their impeccable service and discretion, and her door policy was notoriously selective.

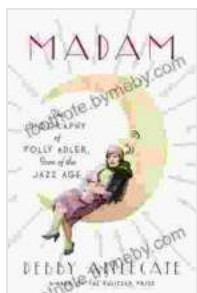
As the 1930s dawned and the Great Depression cast a pall over the country, the Jazz Age came to an end. Speakeasies began to close their doors, and Polly Adler's empire was no exception. But her influence on New York City's nightlife and culture was undeniable. She had paved the way for women to participate fully in the city's social scene, and her speakeasies had served as incubators for some of the greatest artists and thinkers of the era.

In her later years, Polly Adler remained a fixture in New York City society. She wrote a memoir entitled "A House Is Not a Home," which provided a fascinating glimpse into her life and the world of the Jazz Age. She also continued to work in the hospitality industry, managing several restaurants and nightclubs.

Polly Adler passed away in 1991 at the age of 93. Her legacy as a pioneer of New York City nightlife and a symbol of the Jazz Age continues to inspire and fascinate. Her story is a testament to the resilience, ambition, and

indomitable spirit of a woman who defied conventions and lived life on her own terms.

As we delve deeper into the life of Polly Adler, we uncover a complex and fascinating character whose influence on the Jazz Age and American culture continues to resonate today. Through her speakeasies, she created spaces where creativity flourished and societal norms were challenged. She was a trailblazer who paved the way for women to participate fully in the city's social scene, and her legacy as a nightlife icon remains firmly etched in the annals of New York City history.



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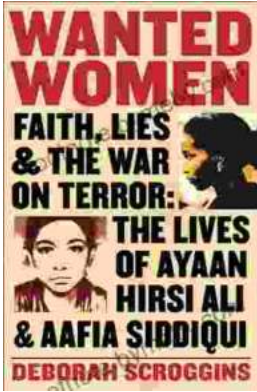
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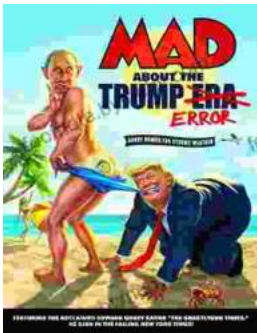
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