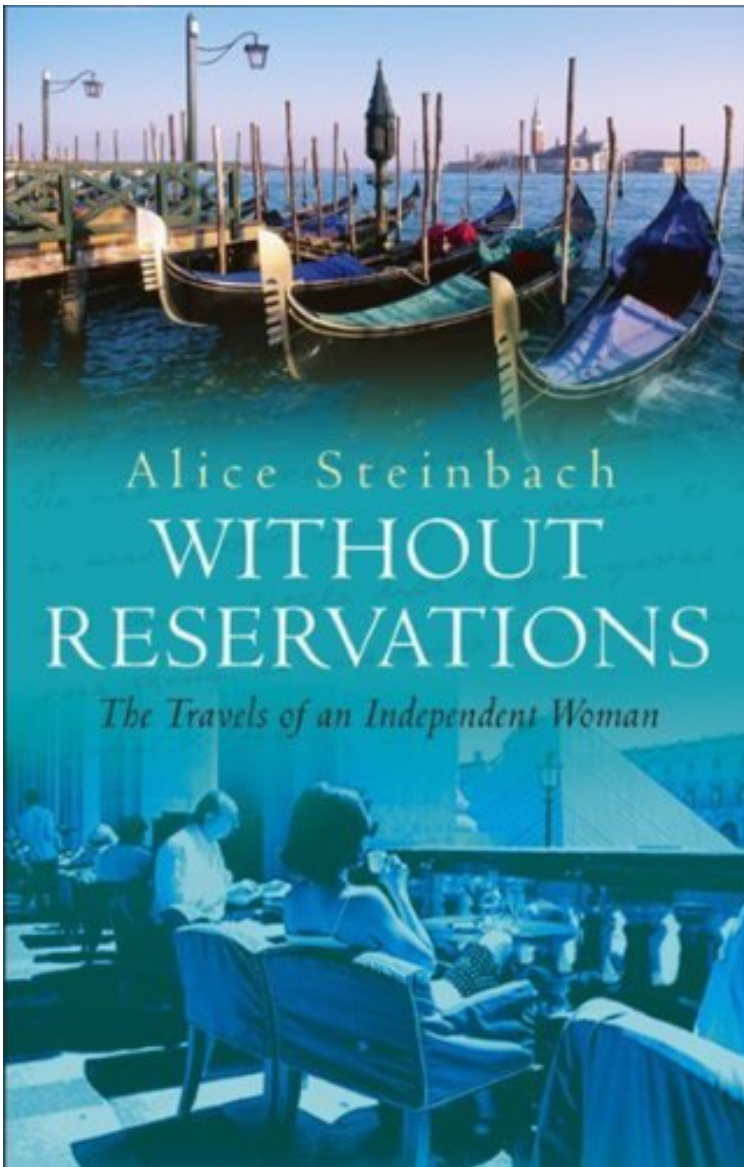


[Get free] File size: 74.Mb

Without Reservations: The Travels Of An Independent Woman



Par Alice Steinbach
DOC / *audiobook / ebooks / Download
PDF / ePub

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #298525 dans eBooksPubli le: 2010-11-30Sorti le: 2010-11-30Format: Ebook Kindle

[Get free] Without Reservations: The Travels Of An Independent Woman

Par Alice Steinbach : Without Reservations: The Travels Of An Independent Woman before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Without Reservations: The Travels Of An Independent Woman:

Download

Read Online

Description : Description du produitParisDear Alice,Each morning I am awakened by the sound of a tinkling bell. A cheerful sound, it reminds me of the bells that shopkeepers attach to their doors at Christmastime. In this case, the bell marks the opening of the hotel door. From my room, which is just off the winding staircase, I can hear it clearly. It reminds me of the bell that calls to worship the novice embarking on a new life. In a way I too am a novice, leaving, temporarily, one life for another.Love,AliceIn the tradition of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's Gift from the Sea and Frances Mayes's Under the Tuscan Sun, in Without Reservations we take time off with Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Steinbach as she explores the world and rediscovers what it means to be a woman on her own."In many ways, I was an independent woman,"

writes Alice Steinbach, a single working mother, in this captivating book. "For years I'd made my own choices, paid my own bills, shoveled my own snow, and had relationships that allowed for a lot of freedom on both sides." Slowly, however, she saw that she had become quite dependent in another way: "I had fallen into the habit . . . of defining myself in terms of who I was to other people and what they expected of me."

Who am I, she wanted to know, away from the things that define me--my family, children, job, friends? Steinbach searches for the answer to this provocative question in some of the most exciting places in the world: Paris, where she finds a soul mate in a Japanese man; Oxford, where she takes a course on the English village; Milan, where she befriends a young woman about to be married. Beautifully illustrated with postcards Steinbach wrote home to herself to preserve her spontaneous impressions, this revealing and witty book will transport readers instantly into a fascinating inner and outer journey, an unforgettable voyage of discovery.

American journalist Alice Steinbach took a year off to live in five cities - Paris, Venice, Milan, London and Oxford - when she realized she had entered a new phase of life. Her sons had graduated from college; she had been divorced for a long time; she was a successful journalist. While there was nothing really wrong with her life, she felt restless. Could she live independently of her family, her friends, her career? Steinbach searches for the answer to this provocative question firstly in Paris, where she finds a soul mate in a Japanese man; in Milan, where she befriends a young woman about to marry, and in the evocative cities of Oxford and Venice. Her trip is peppered with accounts of the exotic strangers she meets, her reflections on life and the observational postcards she wrote to herself during her year away.

I write this sitting in my cozy kitchen on a wintry morning, my old cat dozing beside me on the warm, hissing radiator. An ice storm passed through Baltimore last night, and I can hear the evergreen trees outside my window creaking under the weight of their glazed branches. Six years ago, on a winter's day not unlike this one, I sat at the same table and made a decision that, for me, was quite daring: I decided to take a chance and temporarily jump ship, so to speak, from the life I'd fashioned for myself. This morning I got out a box containing some reminders of where that decision took me. Although I've been searching for a particular item, it's fun seeing whatever turns up. Here, for instance, is the bill for the ten-dollar cappuccino I drank one morning in Venice at the Caffe Florian. And here's a program from a student production in Oxford of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Next comes a ticket to the Museum of Garden History in London, and the receipt for a pair of black silk pumps with four-inch heels, bought in Milan and worn once. The menu from a dinner enjoyed in the Umbrian town of Perugia follows, reminding me of how delicious the Veal Escalope with Red Chicory was that night. Finally in a smaller box labeled PARIS, I find what I'm looking for: a postcard with a view of the city's loveliest bridge, Pont Alexandre III. Dated 9 May 1993, and sent from me to me, the postcard signals the beginning of an adventure: Dear Alice, It is my first morning in Paris and I have walked from my hotel on The Left Bank to the Seine. The river is silver; above it, an early morning sun the color of dull nickel burns through a gray sky, its light glancing off the ancient buildings that line the quai Voltaire. It is the Paris I have come to know from the photographs of Atget and Cartier-Bresson: a city of subtle tonalities, of platinum and silver and gray, a city of incomparable beauty. Now, from this perfect place, I begin a journey. The postcard is signed: Love, Alice. It is the first of many such postcards that I would write and send home to myself as I traveled over the next several months. Or, as I affectionately came to call that interlude in my life, *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Most of us, I suppose, have had at one time or another the impulse to leave behind our daily routines and responsibilities and seek out, temporarily a new life. Certainly it was a fantasy that more than once had taken hold of me. At such times I daydreamed about having the freedom to travel wherever chance or fancy took me, unencumbered by schedules and obligations and too many pre-planned destinations. But the daydream always retreated in the face of reality I was, after all, a working, single mother and my life was shaped in large measure by responsibilities toward my two sons and my work as a newspaper reporter at *The Baltimore Sun*. By 1993, however, I was entering a new phase of my life, one that caused me to rethink its direction. My sons had graduated from college and were entering new adult lives of their own; one as a translator in Japan, the other as a graduate physics student in Colorado. I was happy for them, and proud too. After all, watching a child march successfully into the larger world is one of the greatest satisfactions parenthood has to offer. Still, letting go of my sons left me feeling vulnerable in a way I didn't understand. The powerful bonds between us remained; but physically the boys I had raised were gone. If I close my eyes, I can see them still, on a long-ago summer's night. Two boys, so different: one lying in bed listening to an Orioles game and bouncing a ball off the wall; the other outside in

the backyard, setting up his telescope under a starry indigo sky. Holy moments, I think now of such times.

Without such moments, the house felt quiet and empty. At work my life went on as before. I continued to interview interesting people as well as write a column. It was a challenging, sometimes next-to-impossible job and I was completely invested in it. My work was not only what I did but who I was. Occasionally though, I found myself wondering: was I too invested in it? At times I felt my identity was narrowing down to one thing-being a reporter. What had happened, I wondered, to the woman who loved art and jazz and the feeling that an adventure always lurked just ahead, around some corner? I hadn't seen her in quite a while. Had she disappeared? Or had I just been too busy writing about other people's lives to pay attention to her? There was nothing wrong with my life. I liked its order and familiarity and the idea of having a secure place in the world. Still, the image of that woman who had gone missing kept popping up. One day after reading about a photography course offered in Tuscany I thought, She would find a way to do that. I had the same reaction when I read an article offering room and board on a Scottish sheep farm that trained Border collies: [I bet she'd be on the phone trying to work something out. I found myself wondering if there was some way to reconnect with this missing woman. I sort of admired her. The answer, one that arrived in bits and pieces over the next few months, surprised me. What you need to do, a voice inside me said, is to step out and experience the world without recording it first in a reporter's notebook. After fifteen years of writing stories about other people, you need to get back into the narrative of your own life. It made sense to me. But how to go about doing that? I thought of taking a leave of absence from my job, of traveling to an unfamiliar place where all the old labels that define me-both to myself and others-would be absent. Maybe then, somewhere along the way, I would bump into that other woman. Or, if she no longer existed, maybe such a trip could help me find out who took her place. Although the idea appealed to me, I pushed it aside as impractical, both personally and professionally. Yet I couldn't let go of the fantasy; it sprang out at odd times.

In the middle of the night, I would get up and start figuring out what such a plan might cost and how to finance it. I spent hours in the bookstore travel section poring over possible destinations. At dinner, talking and laughing with friends, I would wonder about my capacity to be a woman in a strange city without an identity without friends. Then I ran through all the reasons why I shouldn't do it. What would I do with my house? Who would take care of my cat? What if some emergency arose at home? Would my editors give me a leave? And if they did, what about the column I wrote twice a week? Would it be assigned to someone else? Suppose I got sick in some strange place? Suppose I disappeared, never to be seen again? But something was working deep inside me and, like a tropical storm, it gathered momentum before hitting me full force with its message: you are a woman in search of an adventure, said the voice inside. Take the risk. Say "Yes" to life instead of "No." Still I hesitated. It was time, I thought, to get some feedback from friends. When I ran the idea by those closest to me, the response was unanimous: Go. Your children are grown and, except for your cat, you're an independent woman. They were partly right. In many ways, I was an independent woman. For years I'd made my own choices, paid my own bills, shoveled my own snow, and had the kind of relationships-with the exception of sons and cats-that allowed for a lot of freedom on both sides. But lately I'd come to see that no matter how much I was in charge of my finances and my time, I was quite dependent in another way. Over the years I had fallen into the habit-a quite natural one, I believe-of defining myself in terms of who I was to other people and what they expected of me as mother, as daughter, as wife, as ex-wife, as reporter, as friend. For a while, at least, I wanted to stand back from these roles and see who emerged. I arrived at the decision to take a leave of absence in January of 1993. With great anxiety I approached my editor and told him what I'd like to do. Within days I had his approval we agreed I would leave in April and return the following January I was elated. Then it hit me: I had no real plan for all the free time now available to me. Except for the first stop. In some unspoken way I'd known all along that I would begin my new life in Paris. "Why Paris?" friends asked. "Why not?" I would reply breezily reluctant to reveal the truth. The truth was that I was pursuing a fantasy-the fantasy of living in a small hotel on the Left Bank just as my journalistic idol, Janet Flanner, had done. From 1925 to 1975, Flanner's famous "Letter from Paris" appeared in *The New Yorker*. The pieces, now collected in book form, still stand as small masterpieces of intelligence and style; like many writers, I studied them as a painter does Cezanne. For years I had wanted to walk, book in hand, through the streets and into the cafes Flanner described so vividly. Now I was about to do it. But after Paris, what? I wanted to keep my plans flexible, but not so loose that I was just wandering aimlessly about. After thinking it over, I came up with two ground rules. One: I did not want to flit from place to place; I wanted to stay a while in the places I chose to visit. And two: my agenda would not include exotic locales. This allowed me to immediately rule out such places as Las Vegas and Katmandu. I

reasoned that while part of my goal was to see if I still had the skills-and the nerve-to make it in a new setting, some kind of cultural connection was necessary For the next several weeks I pieced together from clippings, articles, and guidebooks I'd collected a list of possibilities. Several places in England and Scotland were on the list. So was almost every region in Italy from the Veneto to Campania. At one point I considered spending all my time, after leaving Paris, in Italy But when I came across an article in my travel file on a course given at Oxford on the history of the English village and another on traveling by train through the Scottish Highlands, I abandoned the all-Italy plan. I also moved two of my initial "Possibilities"-Ireland and Provence-into a lesser category headed: "Possible Possibilities." In the end I left Baltimore with a hotel booked in Paris, an apartment almost secured in London, a place reserved in the Oxford course, and a room of my own on a Scottish sheep farm. The rest, I figured, would be negotiated as opportunities presented themselves. But even the slightest of plans can go awry. Life intruded while I was away, more than once. On my way to Scotland, word came of the sudden death of a beloved sister-in-law, and I returned to Baltimore for her funeral. Later, another urgent family matter caused a change in my plans. Life's like that, I told myself on a sad plane trip back to Italy: with awesome impersonality it ambushes us, changing our lives and the lives of those we love in an instant. Of course, on the day I arrived in Paris to begin my leave, I knew nothing of what lay ahead, good or bad. All I knew was a feeling of utter astonishment at finding myself in a small hotel on the Left Bank of the world's most beautiful city It was from this hotel, at the end of my first week, that I wrote the simple truth of what I had been seeking: Last night on the way home from a concert at Sainte-Oapelle, I stopped on the Pont Royal to watch the moon struggle through a cloudy night sky. From the bridge my eyes followed the lights of a tourist boat as it moved like a glowworm across the water Here in Paris, I have no agenda; here I can fall into step with whatever rhythm presents itself. I had forgotten how wonderful it is to stand on a bridge and catch the scent of rain in the air I had forgotten how much I need to be a part of water, wind, sky. Reading this postcard I see myself, carefree and exhilarated, standing in the middle of the bridge, halfway between the Louvre on the Right Bank and the quai Voltaire on the left. What I see is a woman who is not thinking about observing life but experiencing it. The observations would come later, in postcards sent home. From Milan and Siena, from tiny villages along the Amalfi Coast and small towns in the Cotswolds, from London and Oxford, the postcards were waiting for me when I returned, each one recounting like a spontaneous child the impressions of a day spent exploring the world. As I read them, I relived the days spent at Brasenose College in Oxford; the momentous meeting in Paris with Naohiro, a Japanese man who read my soul; the sunny Italian days in Sorrento; the days of self-discovery in Asolo, a village at the foot of the Dolomites. It was not a new habit, writing postcards to myself. It had begun about fifteen years ago, while traveling alone to Bornholm, a remote island in the Baltic Sea. It was homesickness that prompted me to write that first time; the postcard served as a companion, someone with whom I could share my feelings. Over the years, the postcards took on another role: they became a form of travel memoir, preserving and recapturing the feelings of certain moments during a trip. When I see such a postcard, the handwriting oddly familiar, it startles me and, like Proust's madeleine, has the power to plunge me back into the past. Until recently I was convinced-quite smugly so-that I'd invented this form of travel writing. But about four months ago, while going through a box of papers collected from my mother's apartment after her death, I came across a postcard she'd written to herself from Dublin. The picture is a charming view of O'Connell Street and the Gresham Hotel. She writes: We stayed here for eight days. A lovely, comfortable hotel, with Irish poetry readings in the evenings. The food was very good. And Dublin has the loveliest zoo in all of Europe. Tears sprang to my eyes as I read these simple words in a handwriting as familiar as my own. It is the handwriting that signed my grade-school report cards; the handwriting that scribbled out the lists I carried to the corner grocery store; the handwriting that, over the years, in countless letters, supported and encouraged me in good times and bad. Holding the postcard in my hands, I thought of my sons and of the future. Would they someday read my postcards, I wondered, and think of me, as I do now of my mother?

If so, I hope they see me soaring like a bright kite into a big blue sky; happy and adventurous, going wherever the wind takes me. ---Baltimore, January 1999

From the Hardcover edition. From Publishers Weekly

In a travel-book-cum-memoir set against a glamorous background of European cities, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Steinbach describes the months she spent traveling after she took a sabbatical from her job as columnist for the Baltimore Sun. For Steinbach, traveling is an exercise in reconnecting with a more independent and uninhibited side of her personality. Her not-quite-spontaneous adventure begins in Paris, where she finds a kindred spirit in a worldly Japanese businessman. From there she heads off to Oxford, where she takes a course in English village life, and on to Milan, where she meets the most charming of her

fellow travelers, a young American girl soon to be married. The obstacles Steinbach faces on her journeys seem minor--overcoming a fear of ballroom dancing in Oxford and putting aside the habit of always doing "at least two things at once." Only in Milan, when she was nearly mugged, does Steinbach experience anything harrowing. Though the descriptions of each locale are thin, they are not really the purpose of this memoir; rather, the author's intent is to connect emotionally with each city and to learn "to take chances. To have adventures [and] to see if I could still hack it on my own, away from the security of work, friends and an established identity." Supplying more finely observed details might have made this a richer book, but the writing is generally optimistic, warm and genuine in a Chicken-Soup-for-Travelers kind of way. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.