



The Book of Wanderings: A Mother-Daughter Pilgrimage

Kimberly Meyer

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To a mother and daughter on an illuminating pilgrimage, this is what the desert said: Carry only what you need. Burn what can't be saved. Leave the remnants as an offering.

When Kimberly Meyer gave birth to her first daughter, Ellie, during her senior year of college, the bohemian life of exploration she had once imagined for herself was lost in the responsibilities of single motherhood. For years, both mother and daughter were haunted by how Ellie came into being-Kimberly through a restless ache for the world beyond, Ellie through a fear of abandonment.

Longing to bond with Ellie, now a college student, and longing, too, to rediscover herself, Kimberly sets off with her daughter on a quest for meaning across the globe. Leaving behind the rhythms of ordinary life in Houston, Texas, they dedicate a summer to retracing the footsteps of *Felix Fabri*, a medieval Dominican friar whose written account of his travels resonates with Kimberly. Their mother-daughter pilgrimage takes them to exotic destinations infused with mystery, spirituality, and rich history-from Venice to the Mediterranean through Greece and partitioned Cyprus, to Israel and across the Sinai Desert with Bedouin guides, to the Palestinian territories and to Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt.

In spare and gorgeous prose, *The Book of Wanderings* tells the story of Kimberly and Ellie's journey, and of the intimate, lasting bond they forge along the way. A meditation on stripping away the distractions, on simplicity, on how to live, this is a vibrant memoir with the power to both transport readers to far-off lands and to bring them in closer connection with themselves. It will appeal to anyone who has contemplated the road not taken, who has experienced the gnawing feeling that there is something more, who has faced the void-of offspring leaving, of mortality looming, of searching for someplace that feels, finally, like home.

The Book of Wanderings: A Mother-Daughter Pilgrimage Details

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From Reader Review The Book of Wanderings: A Mother-Daughter Pilgrimage for online ebook

Lori says

I was a goodeads first reads winner of this book. There are several genres this book can be in. Non fiction, inspirational, and historical. Kimberly Meyer decided she wanted to go on the same pilgrimage as Felix Fabri did in the mid 1400s. She asked her oldest daughter Ellie who was 18 if she wanted to go with her. this book is about the journey the two women took together.

Their pilgrimage starts in Venice, then to Cyprus, next the Holy land, then the Sinai desert, then Cairo. the author writes about the pilgrimage that Felix Fabri went on during the mid 1400s and what each country was like during that time in history. she describes what each country like now. the people, traditions, poverty in certain places etc. the pilgrimage lasted two months. a chance for discovery, reconnection with her daughter Ellie. i can see this is a very heartfelt book by the author. She took a lot of time to describe the historical facts about each country then and now. I had a hard time getting into the book at times. It may be very interesting to those who like to read about history, different countries and such.

Michelle Lancaster says

Memoir / Travel

KIMBERLY MEYER

The Book of Wanderings:

A Mother-Daughter Pilgrimage

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The Book of Wanderings: A Mother-Daughter Pilgrimage by Houston professor Kimberly Meyer is equal parts memoir, travelogue, philosophical treatise, and love letter to her firstborn daughter, Ellie. Meyer yearned for a “bohemian-explorer-intellectual kind of life” but became pregnant in her senior year of college. After Ellie is born, Meyer attends grad school, marries, and gives birth to two more daughters. She sets aside youthful ambitions until she comes across The Book of the Wanderings of Brother Felix Fabri in the Holy Land, Arabia, and Egypt during dissertation research, a discovery that reawakens those earlier dreams.

Meyer and eighteen-year-old Ellie embark on a trip following Father Fabri’s footsteps: beginning in Ulm, Germany, proceeding south through Italy to Greece, across the Mediterranean to Israel and the Palestinian Territories, then south again into the Sinai desert, arriving two months later in Cairo. The juxtaposition between Fabri’s pilgrimage and the author’s reminds us that not much has changed in five hundred years. People still plunge into the Jordan River fully clothed. Bedouins still keep watch over flocks of sheep. Monks still walk the Via Dolorosa.

Meyer ably contrasts the mundane frustrations of travel—language confusion, unfamiliar food, unreliable transportation—and the transcendent moments when you make that ineffable connection with those who came before you, “swallowed up...in...the sweep of historical time.” There is elegant imagery: “When Mohammad Atwa Musa knocked on the door to retrieve me, all the women, as one, deftly lifted their veils to

cover themselves, the movement like the taking flight of a flock of birds.” And vivid description: “Scattered across the undulating azure waves are Chinese junks, Indian dhows, European galleys and caravels. On land, in the spaces between the rivers and the place-names and the mountains, rise walled cities with their golden crenellated towers and minarets and onion domes and Gothic spires. In the deserts: conical tents, carmine and emerald and sapphire, their flaps open to the sirocco winds.”

With self-deprecating humor and gentle irony, Meyer describes their travels, attempts peace with dread of the rapidly approaching empty nest, and searches for spiritual solace that has always eluded her, struggling to balance the push of “pure possibility” and the pull of the familiar. But during the trip she’s conflicted and feels unmoored. “What did I want? To be essential to other human beings or to be free...? These were mutually exclusive options, even if we were pretending with this trip that I could have both.”

Confronting Sartre’s “God-shaped hole” in modern Western life, *The Book of Wanderings* contemplates the existential. Is home a particular place, person, or thing, or is it within us? Do we find ourselves there or when we leave? Is the search for objective truth futile? “We exist. We don’t know why. We die. We don’t know what follows. We love. What we love will leave us. We suffer though we have tried to be good. These aren’t questions and they don’t have answers.”

Originally published in Lone Star Literary Life.

Lauren Bujorian says

One of the other reviews likened this book to *The Gilmore Girls* television show. I couldn't agree more. It's so similar in humor and banter. I think the fact that I'm rewatching that show currently helped me find the similarities between the two. This book is well written, enjoyable and an excellent memoir. If you want a good read about a mother and daughter relationship and you enjoyed *The Gilmore Girls* then this is definitely a book for you to read!

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I actually went to a reading by the author and heard her read the last chapter or so before I started this book, so I also had the context of questions she answered and a little more background as a whole. I read the copy owned by the professor who I took a creative non-fiction class from, after she had read it and marked it up in preparation for discussion with her class. (This is now my new favorite way to read! I want to read more books from friends who write in their books.)

Kimberly Meyer gave up a life of wandering when she had her oldest daughter, before finishing her undergraduate degree. Or at least, she has been thinking that way for a long time. As her daughter approaches adulthood, she comes up with the idea for a mother-daughter trip for the two of them - retracing the journey that Felix Fabri took in the 1480s (the translation of his account is also called *The Book of the Wanderings of Brother Felix Fabri*). The reasoning for following his journey is a bit of a puzzle, really. Meyer herself is not a religious person and not a devout follower of any religion. Fabri was following the path of Christian pilgrims as they moved between holy places.

Meyer's research is apparent, both the traditional book research and what she knew of the time and place of

Fabri, as well as her reflection on her own experiences. It was interesting to me to read more about how the medieval mindset made the experience of practicing Christianity entirely different from anyone living and practicing post-reformation. I suppose I had never thought of it precisely in that way before. She is able to find interesting connections to this distinction, in art museums and church architecture, in the changing views of "holy" places.

I found myself less interested in the mother-daughter aspect of the book. I think this is partly because it is so one-sided, and her feelings about her daughter seem a bit too frequent due to their repetition. It would have been interesting (and maybe impossible) to have the daughter's perspective woven in as a thread - maybe this could have been done through letters she sent, her own journal, etc. Instead it becomes more of a drawn-out grieving of her daughter's pending flight from the nest. The author has a scholarly distance from the historical research, a healthy reflective distance from her own travel experiences, but lacks perspective in the relationship with her daughter. I'm not sure there is any way around it; it's true to where she was when she wrote the book, but somehow that thread felt the weakest. I do understand that she is attempting to explain that her experience of God comes through being a mother, that this is the closest she has come to a presence outside of herself.

Meyer is a very strong writer. I felt carried along with the sporty Franciscan friars, the bleak and dangerous desert, the frequent shaming she and her daughter experienced for daring to show skin. Because I had so recently read an account of a solo female's trip up the Niger (Cruelest Journey: Six Hundred Miles To Timbuktu), where Kira Salak encountered people of the same background (Bedouin) and had to navigate similarly awkward and male-dominated social situations without having the ability to understand it fully within its cultural context, it was like I was revisiting a place I had recently experienced. This experience and "memory" may have only been in my reading, but to come back to the desert so soon was a strange comfort.

The last few sentences in the chapter about walking the Via Dolorosa:

"I liked this idea of God as the movement between people. God as the invisible suturing. God as the fluidity between what exists and what cannot always be observed. God as activity. God not as the finite Samaritan but as his act of binding the wounds of the man abandoned on the Jericho Road. Goad as the swaddling of my child and the staring at her. God as Ellie walking with me along the Via Dolorosa. The Via not as a stone path but as the act of traveling on it."

I'm pretty sure I'm going to discuss this on a future episode of Reading Envy, so will post the link at that point.

Kimberly says

My mom and I each bought a copy to read together and found that this book just wasn't for us. It was a bit too dry and too heavy with descriptions that weighed the story down. I'm sure that the actual pilgrimage was quite a life changing experience but the book version was very long and difficult to get through.

Lynne says

"Some say we are all pilgrims. Pilgrims, from the Latin peregrini-per, 'through'; ager, 'field, land, country.' We're wanderers and strangers, foreigners, aliens, exiles. We're on a journey, trying to return to some

spiritual home." (p. 13)

What initially drew me to this book was the fact that it was a story concerning a mother and daughter, together in several of the places that I have always wanted to visit, in addition to one country that I in reality lived in at one point in my life. What I did not expect was the major role that religion would play in the book, though I did have an inkling of it since the book is called *The Book of Wanderings*.

Coming into *The Book of Wanderings*, I thought it would focus more on the mother-daughter bonding on top of their travel experiences. Instead, we receive a much deeper story that includes all of what I was expected in addition to discussions regarding philosophy, history, faith and spirituality. And while we do discover more about both Kimberly and her daughter as individuals, we don't get to view them interacting with each as much as I thought which left me feeling slightly disappointed.

Thus for me, this book was a bit of a mixed bag. Several parts I found extremely compelling and I flew through those sections such as the time they spent in Israel. This was probably due to the fact that those sections made me feel nostalgic for the time I spent living in Israel, and I was curious to observe their impressions of places that I have visited myself. Meanwhile other sections felt a bit long winded and came off as rather dry.

Nevertheless, *The Book of Wanderings* definitely is a touchingly poignant story of self discovery and finding a place where you belong. In the conclusion, reading this book was much akin to embarking on a pilgrimage of my own, at times it felt long and difficult although ultimately I believe it was worth it.

Marcie Lovett says

I really wanted to like this book. It started out strong, but it turns out that we learn all we need to know about Kimberly Meyer before she leaves on her "pilgrimage."

There is so much beautiful writing in this book and so much that's boring and redundant. The story that inspired Meyer is intertwined with her own journey and sometimes it's hard to tell that she's back recounting the inspiration, not her trip, which is confusing.

I found myself skipping a lot of the writing about Fabri; I just didn't find it interesting and preferred reading descriptions of her trip, which were often poetic.

As for the mother-daughter of the title, Meyer ropes her teenage daughter into a long, often boring trek and then wonders why the daughter isn't more interested. She repeatedly refers back to adventures the family had when her daughters were small; the daughter functions more as an accessory than a character in the story.

Rose Beyke says

I won this book in a Goodreads Giveaway. I finished it over Mother's Day weekend. I am fifty four years old, my daughter is thirty three. We hope to have our own journey someday to Ireland. I am a historian and enjoyed the details of the book. I wish there had been more about the mother/daughter relationship, rather than so much of the history of where they were visiting, since that was what I was expecting. Still a good

read.

Andi Kramer says

Some books have universal appeal. This one is not that case. It's for women, for those that feel that pull of wanderlust, and very much for mothers. If you fit into those categories, I strongly recommend this book. It tackles the choice of between exploring and settling, children leaving the nest & the concept of home, all through following in the footsteps of a friar on a pilgrimage.

Juliet says

Glad I read it, but some descriptions and references to history were too long and too detailed.

Pam Mooney says

I loved the premise of this book and that mother and daughter clearly were able to get what they wanted from the journey. For myself, as the reader, these feelings did not come through to me in the text. I felt lost most of the time as we jumped from history to religion to illness through different countries and guides/perspectives. Throwing in the drama of the backdrop of past and present relationships made it even more confusing. I left the story, however, happy that somehow this family healed and will continue on to future happiness.

Gwen says

The Book of Wanderings: A Mother-Daughter Pilgrimage was a complicated book to me. The mother wrote the book and from her perspective I didn't see too much mother/daughter interaction. This was clearly the mother's trip and the daughter came along for the ride. The mother wanted to follow the journey of a monk named Fabri and it seems had wished to do so from her early adulthood, however motherhood curtailed those wishes. To me, the book felt a bit on the "school book" side, which is understandable as the author is a teacher. I did enjoy parts of the narrative, thereby the 3 star rating.

I received this book free from Goodreads First Reads.

Miriam says

So great! An eye-opening memoir that is fascinating and thoughtful. And I couldn't help but think it was like The Gilmore Girls on a pilgrimage--with more weight and fewer weird townspeople.

Lisa says

This was a Goodreads Giveaway and I really wanted to like it but grew tired of the author blaming her daughter for her being unable to pursue a bohemian-explorer-intellectual lifestyle. She nearly flogs this to death. When the author decides to follow in the footsteps of Friar Felix Fabri she asks her daughter to join her so she won't be alone. She finds herself resentful at times as Ellie has her own plans and interests. "I had given her the gift of the thing I had renounced for her sake. Why couldn't she show a little more appreciation?" She also states that, "I didn't feel that I really belonged anywhere" and a bored and embarrassed child of the suburbs. Ellie's getting ready to leave and make a life for herself and the author is grieving this as well as the fact that her younger daughters are heading out the door.

Linda Tuplin says

This was a memoir of a very personal pilgrimage, with very personal lessons and enlightenments, not necessarily applicable to every reader. There was little about the daughter, but she talked openly about what almost seemed to be resentment for a child born before she was ready, and the life she sacrificed to have her. Her love for her child was obvious. Maybe this was more about the loss of what might have been, and the losses yet to come. Parts of it really made me think, but I got bogged down in unfamiliar geography. There is a wanderer in me that I often regret not having the courage to embrace, before life and children took me in another direction. I think that is just a normal part of growing older and letting things go.
