



Educating Alice: Adventures of a Curious Woman

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Eight years ago, Alice Steinbach, a Pulitzer Prize–winning columnist for the *Baltimore Sun*, decided to take a break from her life. She took a leave from job, friends, and family for a European journey of self-discovery, and her first book, **Without Reservations**, was the exquisite result.

But once Steinbach had opened the door to a new way of living, she found herself unwilling to return to the old routine. She quit her job and left home again, only this time her objective was to find a way that would allow her, personally and professionally, to combine three of her greatest passions: learning, traveling, and writing.

This funny and tender book is the result of her decision to roam around the world as an informal student, taking lessons and courses in such things as French cooking in Paris, Border collie training in Scotland, traditional Japanese arts in Kyoto, architecture and art in Havana. With warmth and wit, Steinbach guides us through the pleasures and perils of discovering how to be a student again. Along the way, she also learns the true value of this second chance at educating herself: the opportunity to connect with and learn from the people she meets on her journey.

From the Hardcover edition.

Educating Alice: Adventures of a Curious Woman Details

Date : Published (first published January 1st 2004)

ISBN :

Author : Alice Steinbach

Format : Kindle Edition 386 pages

Genre : Travel, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Adventure, Cultural, France, Biography
Memoir, Japan, Language, Writing, Adult

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From Reader Review Educating Alice: Adventures of a Curious Woman for online ebook

Catie says

Recommendation from Caro - 8/24/2017

Martha says

This woman took a year off from her job at a newspaper to travel around the globe learning various things. It starts in France at a cooking school, and ends in Scotland learning to herd sheep with working border collies. Her tales are interesting most of the time, and her writing draws you in (one of my favorites is her dancing in a bar in Cuba) so you experience the places, people and cultures like you were travelling with her. This is one woman who dreamed of places and things she wanted to experience, and had the guts to make it happen. Some of the things she undertook were difficult (writing stories in a short time and then getting critiqued by your classmates), some simply enjoyable (visiting gardens in Provencal, France). This is a wonderful memoir that makes you ponder what adventures to undertake for yourself.

Carla Catalano says

Alice Steinbach (author of *Without Reservations*) certainly has a curious mind and the fever of wanderlust. It would be great if we could all be Alice and pick 6 or 8 destinations each with a variety and long list of things to learn and write about. Alice's greatest gift and honed skill is her curiosity and the ability to find people all over ready to satisfy her thirst for knowledge and answers. Alice begins her travels at the Ritz Escoffier Cooking School and ends the book on the Hill of Camstraddan (a Scottish Farm) to learn the rudiments of training Border Collies and to attend the dog trials held in the nearby village. Other excursions include Alice learning to dance in the Wakayagi style in Kyoto and understand about the fine art of becoming a Geisha and origami. The old Florentine church, Santa Maria Del Fiore, Exeter University and a course on Jane Austen, In-Depth knowledge about Cuban artists, street life, culture and history, Secret Gardens in France belonging to actors, celebs, designers and more including a Charles University seminar Czech Lit & Culture & writing workshop. We would all the love the opportunity to have a slice of Steinbach's life and the ability to choose what we love and want to learn more about. A luxurious, and indulgent read...

JG (The Introverted Reader) says

Alice Steinbach makes the time to travel the world again, taking local classes that interest her and observing the cultures she finds. She studies cooking in Paris, Japanese culture/arts in Kyoto, several aspects of Florence, Jane Austen in England, Cuban culture in Havana, the gardens of the south of France, writing in Prague, and training Border Collies for sheepdog trials in Scotland.

I loved *Without Reservations*, Steinbach's first book. I admired her courage in packing up and traveling solo. I liked her thoughts and observations and felt that she is someone that I'd like to know and befriend in real

life.

I didn't like *Educating Alice* quite as much. I felt that the author was trying a little too hard to recapture the magic of her first memoir and lost some of her charm. That sounds harsher than I mean it to, but that's the best I can do.

There's more introspection in this book, which can be good, but I honestly wanted more about the locations. I never got a good feel for some places, such as Prague and Kyoto.

But the places she got right were fabulous.

My husband is a second-generation Cuban-American so Havana naturally interests me. Ms. Steinbach was at her best in her descriptions of this city that time forgot. The old cars, the music, the dancing, the people--I'm ready to pack my bags. The only thing that I disagreed with was her description of the food! She was not a fan and seemed to take it for granted that the rest of the world acknowledges that Cuban food is uninspiring. What?!? Their dishes make my mouth water, they're so rich in flavor and homeyness.

There's a running theme of her letters to Naohiro and her thoughts on their long-distance relationship. Somehow, this all felt unnecessary. Part of the charm is that she's doing this alone. I did like knowing that they were still together and their relationship was growing but those kinds of books are easy to find. Her travels are what make this book special. Again, that sounds harsh and I don't mean it that way--I just feel the book would have been stronger had all of this been trimmed.

Fans of *Without Reservations* should go ahead and pick this one up; I think you'll enjoy it. I would recommend that new readers give her first memoir a try before reading this one.

Liz Wilson says

I have a thing about needing to finish every book that I start...this book made it really really really difficult. I have nothing good to say about it. I found her narrative to be forced and her commentary totally weak. Don't ever read this book.

Bridget says

Educating Alice : the Adventures of a Curious Woman, by Alice Steinbach.

I received this book from a friend who read it and thought I would enjoy it. I really did! Alice Steinbach worked for approximately twenty years as a reporter for a Baltimore newspaper, and as part of that job, traveled all over the world. Though she enjoyed the work, she found herself at a point in her life where she longed to be more on her own, not tied to a specific job, but still able to write. So she resigned/retired from her reporter's job, and set out "to travel around the world as an informal student, taking lessons in such things as French cooking in Paris, Border Collie training in Scotland, traditional Japanese Arts in Kyoto, and the architecture and art of Havana." She freely admits to venturing into these fields not to become a

professional, but to “add little bits of knowledge here and there to what I was born not knowing.”

The best part of this book is the author’s voice, and her willingness to admit that she struggles – and sometime just completely does not comprehend – some of the things she has chosen to do. The writing is conversational, with the typical asides and segues that occur when friends are talking. I enjoyed her descriptions of places and people that she met along the way, as well as finding out about the topics she chose to study. If you enjoy reading about other people’s travels, I think you would enjoy this book quite a bit.

Jane says

A friend recommend this book to me after I told her that one of my main goals as a recent retiree was to find the beauty in things and become a more educated person. Even though it is not a great book, it fit into my ambitions, suggesting avenues that would not have immediately occurred to me. The author, Alice, has a simple, dry writing style as befits a newspaper journalist, and perhaps in recognition of this, she spices the book up with childhood memories and letters and conversations with the Japanese man with whom she is conducting a long distance romance. Some times when she enters this personalization mode, I want to tell her not to bother because it seems too forced. I didn't mind the romance, since the two do meet up on her trip, but the transcribed letters to him that she includes in the book seem to be a shortcut to writing about particular events in her travels, as if she is thinking, hmm, I've already written about this when I wrote to Naohiro, so why rewrite it for the book--plus, I'll earn points for personalizing.

Probably the most personally revealing of her educational activities is the writing workshops Alice takes in Prague. She doesn't like it. I wonder if as a professional writer she felt that her writing assignments for the class would receive critical acclaim from her fellow students. When the class didn't recognize her passion for the subject of her writing, Alice concludes that "workshopping" isn't for her. Even though she repeated to herself her teacher's guidance that the students who are having their work critiqued should pay attention to the contents of the critique, Alice turns off on the whole thing, missing the point that she was hearing advice not just from author-wannabes but from people who are a microcosm of her potential readership.

The snarky reader in me wonders what Alice's budget was for her trip, but in truth, I respect her a great deal for taking it and know that it's not money that's stopping me from doing something similar--it's the fact that I don't think I would enjoy traveling alone. So, more power to you, Alice. You are a work in progress just as we all are, and I appreciate your adventures as an inspiration for my own.

Lynda says

I wanted to love this book. The description sounded perfect to me. I also share a love of travel and taking classes on anything that interests me. The difference is that I have trouble writing letters about my experiences, much less writing essays about these travels and learning experiences.

I did love the chapter on the French cooking school and her descriptions of the people she met and places she explored. Also, I was charmed by her study of Japanese culture. As a Jane Austen addict, I loved her tour of Jane Austen territory and her foray into the company of Austen scholarship. I admired her ability to connect

with the Cuban people and their crumbling culture.

I was interested into her sidetrips into history in Prague and Florence, but her interruptions to discuss her personal history and her long distance romance with a Japanese professional was an unwelcome diversion.

But it was her investigation of the gardens of Provence and the training of Scottish sheep dogs bored me to tears.

While I was impressed by the people she met and I was admiring of her ability to connect with strangers who were willing to talk to her and even invite her into their homes. As the tales wore on I admit that I started to get suspicious of the universal acceptance and the willingness of total strangers to go out of their way to answer her questions and take her on tours.

alysa says

This book was extremely hard to get through. It just didn't hold my interest, and I kept falling asleep. It is a series of stories about this woman's travels. Although some of the information she presented about the various locations was interesting, I felt the author was searching for a point and didn't make it. I felt that the time line jumped around too much. As she would talk about the various places she seemed to talk about the days of her visit unchronologically and that made it kind of hard to follow. I thought she was going to learn some profound lesson from each place and the reader would be able to take away something valuable. This just didn't happen. It really was just ramblings from some woman who thought her travel log would be interesting for others. The only part of the book that truly held my interest was when she wrote a little fiction about a young girl during WWII who lived in Prague. Other than that I was pretty disappointed in this book as I thought it would be so much more interesting.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I am a huge fan of women's travel writings, and this is one of the best yet. Alice didn't just travel to places, she did things like enroll in a cooking school, learn how to train a border collie in Scotland, learn traditional Japanese dance... it was more of an educational travel tale.

Linda says

In "Without Reservations" Alice Steinbach took a leave of absence from her journalist job at the Baltimore Sun and traveled in Europe. When she tried to return to her old routine, she discovered that her curiosity was leading her back to more travel and a chance to learn new things. She takes a French cooking class in Paris, explores architecture and art in Havana, learns to train border collies to herd sheep in Scotland, studies Jane Austen in England, and takes a course in writing non-fiction in Prague. Along the way she meets fascinating people and keeps up her correspondence with her Japanese friend Mr. Naohiro whom she met in Paris in her earlier travels. Alice is comfortable with opening conversations with people she has just met, and she sounds like a person it would be fun to be with. I enjoyed this book very much.

Alice says

I'm not sure why I didn't love this book, it seems to include all the right things: international travel, learning new things, and someone named Alice ;-). But, I found the 'education' part of it kind of boring and superficial - she just dabbled in things that people do in retirement to keep from getting bored; and even then she didn't seem to actually complete much - doing only a couple of weeks of a longer cooking course in Paris, coming without a manuscript to a writing workshop in Prague. Her "learning" just wasn't motivated and prepared enough for me. But . . . the money she must have spent! The discussion of her fabulous hotels and how she felt a kinship with all the idle rich she met, blech. Despite outward appearances, it just wasn't my cup of tea.

Katrina says

I loved Without Reservations because it was based entirely on Alice's travels. This book, however, was more focused on the courses she took in various countries and little about the travel to reach them. Just not to my liking.

Angie says

I find myself having really mixed feelings about this book. On the bright side, Alice's adventures REALLY made me want to travel! Her explorations to the French gardens were especially relaxing, and her visit to Japan and the study of geisha life was really interesting. And I absolutely LOVED the chapter on discovering Jane Austen's life in England...I want to go on the tours she described!! The author also had some nice insight from time to time on the culture at hand or life as a whole. In addition, I admired her boldness and sense of adventure in traveling alone – and her connection with everyone she meets. (Although there were moments when this seemed too good to be true.)

HOWEVER...the author obviously lives a very privileged life, and she really never acknowledges this. I couldn't help but feel green with envy at times at her life style. Also, it annoyed me that she has already been to many of the places several times, and is almost TOO cultured. For example, she might talk about how she been to such and such a place a hundred times, but THIS hotel is new to her. Or how she always stays on the 'Left Bank' in Paris – she's never been much for the 'Right Bank.' Huh. In any case, much of wonderment of travel is lost because she is so familiar with everything, and in that way I found it hard to relate to her.

Some of the chapters and travels were definitely better than others, as were some of the tours. For some, she seemed to just transcribe what the tour guide said directly into the book. I found myself thinking that, sometimes, you just really need to be there. I also thought she could have left out her romance with Naohiro, or maybe developed it more. It just seemed out of place in this largely non-personal book.

Melanie says

I quite enjoyed most of the individual chapters in this, especially the ones about adventures in England, France, and Scotland , but the book as a whole I found a bit lacking. I kept expecting for there to be a unifying theme or experience that just wasn't there - no Grand Plan laid out in the prologue for why these particular trips were chosen, no Great Philosophy of travel (other than hotels are good), no point for each trip other than to finish it and "learn" something, and far too little relation between traveling and the narrator's life to justify the jarring recollections of personal relationships a la Eat, Pray, Love that are peppered throughout. If I had realized all of this going in, I suspect I would have enjoyed it more rather than expecting it to be something it wasn't.
