



Solitude: Seeking Wisdom in Extremes: A Year Alone in the Patagonia Wilderness

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Years after losing his lower right leg in a motorcycle crash, Robert Kull traveled to a remote island in Patagonia's coastal wilderness with equipment and supplies to live alone for a year. He sought to explore the effects of deep solitude on the body and mind and to find the spiritual answers he'd been seeking all his life. With only a cat and his thoughts as companions, he wrestled with inner storms while the wild forces of nature raged around him. The physical challenges were immense, but the struggles of mind and spirit pushed him even further.

Solitude: Seeking Wisdom in Extremes is the diary of Kull's tumultuous year. Chronicling a life distilled to its essence, *Solitude* is also a philosophical meditation on the tensions between nature and technology, isolation and society. With humor and brutal honesty, Kull explores the pain and longing we typically avoid in our frantically busy lives as well as the peace and wonder that arise once we strip away our distractions. He describes the enormous Patagonia wilderness with poetic attention, transporting the reader directly into both his inner and outer experiences.

Solitude: Seeking Wisdom in Extremes: A Year Alone in the Patagonia Wilderness **Details**

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From Reader Review Solitude: Seeking Wisdom in Extremes: A Year Alone in the Patagonia Wilderness for online ebook

Erin Bradley says

I really wanted to like this book, but in the end it was a slog to finish. So much pretension and self-absorbtion I wanted to slap him 85% of the time. And enough abuse heaped on the poor goddamn cat. He took what could have clearly been a wonderous and wonderful experience and painstakingly picked it apart to misery. He'll never find the joy and enlightenment he seeks because he chooses to always be in a ruffled up state of existential crisis. This was not the book for me.

Legacy Dad says

I had high hopes for this book yet 120 pages in; I'm infuriated with the author. All he does is complain about his aches and pains and how he needs to deal with it naturally, yet then succumbs to taking painkillers and sleeping?

His religious hodgepodge is also hard to follow; he takes pieces of dogma from all religions and adopts it as his own, yet follows none exclusively. I great example of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

I am waiting in anticipation for some spiritual or intellectual breakthrough but so far it seems this book is simply an aging, hippy-baby boomers, new age drivel about why he can't commit to relationships and why he has a hard time dealing with reality and society. Maybe what he really needed was a year in therapy instead of a year of solitude to help him deal with his numerous psychological issues?

Currently I would give this 2 stars but I am hoping it gets better.

Update

I finished the book and bumped it up to three stars simply because the author finally makes some breakthroughs in the last 50 pages of the book. The only question that remains is were these revelations authentic or simply conjured because he was running out of time and needed to finish a PhD dissertation?

Ed says

Well if you don't have a year to spend alone on a small bare island in southern Chilean Patagonia, this is the next best thing. I loved this book which is really a day by day journal of the year the author spent alone without any human contact but for a monthly satellite phone 'I am OK' message and one visit from the navy. It is also probably the most ruthlessly honest account of someone's own failings. There is no final enlightenment but a slow accumulation of a different take on life. And the author managed to take me to the island and live the year with him in a way few authors have ever done in other travel books. The book is a combination of wilderness survival and inner journey and he has the balance almost perfect. And just as the experience changed the author, I guess I feel it changed me and gave me a new take on life. Having been on

a boat trip through Chilean Patagonia, I can still feel the place and this book refreshed the memories of one of the great places on earth.

Elizabeth says

Crappy book!! I was so disappointed! First, it is written in diary form. This makes it super choppy and it doesn't flow well. I got really tired of reading basically the same entry every day. It rained a lot, the wind blew a lot, he went fishing, he watched birds, he built stuff. There you have a synopsis of all that happens. I got tired of his whining. He brought a kitten along. The kitten cried a lot. He got frustrated that the cat wouldn't submit to his will and shut up. He would hit the cat, dunk it in water, throw it and squeeze it until it cried. Then after each incident, he would ask if this made him abusive. THE ANSWER IS YES MR. KULL!!! You would answer in the affirmative then still do it. You questioned the ethics of killing mussels for a study and yet you didn't question the ethics of abusing a cat. This book could have been written in a better way and still get his story across. The whole glacier "adventure" was anti climactic. Skip this book. No excitement. No nothing. Incredibly boring. Read something better.

Stasia says

While it's rare, especially in the lone-adventure-in-the-woods genre I'd put this book in, I just couldn't finish it. It's basically an edited version of Robert Krull's journal from a year spent living in solitude on an island off the coast of Chile, with interludes where he waxes philosophical about the meta-process of writing and trying to come to terms with solitude.

He raises some interesting points, and as someone who likes solo adventure and journal-writing, I can relate to some of it, but overall it was just too all-about-me for me. I didn't particularly sympathize with Krull, which made it hard to care too much about his daily musings and sometimes tedious activities, and a year-long journey of introspection was just too much to handle. Once I realized I didn't really care if I finished it or not, it was over. Which is saying a lot, since it was the only book I had on my recent bike trip.

A promising book that went nowhere. Oh well.

Seamus says

while the author did not kill himself after being alone for a year, I thought about it while reading this book...

Dovofthegalilee says

It's always important to remember that a person who writes a book such as this is sharing his personal story. It's not something he or she set out to contrive to get people to get deep into the characters, they are the character. Over the past twenty years I've amassed a small collection of books like this one and each and everyone is different and yet they all have something in common. The commonness I've seen is that with so much alone time a person is going to gravitate towards certain ideas or themes. Some go on for page after

page of flowers or animal behavior and while some of that is here he hones in on religion\philosophy. For me I began to feel saturated with his lengthy heady ideas, perhaps person to person it would have been more enjoyable but in this format I just wanted to finish the book. I did find the author more honest perhaps a little too honest about some of the things going on in his mind but perhaps that should be chalked up to bravery. One small detail in this book that is so uncommon in it's peers is the detailed list of provisions he brought which was nicely done as well as a full disclosure of books brought with him. That;s a question I always ask in these sort of books and it is rarely answered so two thumbs up for that. Something else that was a first for me was the online web site to see pictures of this venture, There's none in the book but on the web there are many that would never make the cutting room floor if it did include a selection.

Lynne says

This was a struggle for me. I was looking for more wilderness tied into personal growth and less discussion of philosophy in general. And I don't have a background in philosophy so that is especially where the struggle occurred for me. While each person has decisions to make about the level of comfort they will have on a journey, I wasn't able to connect with the author due to the use of the email/phone/computer system. And also the treatment of Cat.

John Braine says

I've a particular interest int his kind of writing about nature and the great outdoors and have a passing interest in the benefits of solitude also, so might not be for everyone but I thought this was a fascinating insight into solitude in the wilderness.

Juan Duarte says

A worth while read for those seeking answers.

Ron Christiansen says

To live on one's own for year, especially in this climate, is an amazing physical and emotional feat. I can't imagine. I've done a few measly solo trips to Captitol Reef, hiking all day on my own and seeing few people yet still staying in the main campground. Even that amount of solitude has caused an emotional flood. One year--that's a long time.

And Kull doesn't just recount but reflects and connects his experience to many spiritual and scholarly theories. His bent is clearly Buddhist and it works for me. Too much to quote and explain but I will offer up some of his phrases which represent his view of life:

gentle transformation
everything is a natural manifestation of life
leaning lightly into pain

to be with life in all its manifestations
spiritual explorers
sink into the now
soften aversion and desires
spaciousness

So many of his insights parallel insights I've come to in my own life. Often exact words or phrases I'd used recently in figuring out how to let go of my desire to control things popped up in his text time and again. Some will find certain sections tedious, some will find him too eastern and meditative...for me, I found a soulmate. His ideas will continue to percolate in my gut for a long long time.

Melissa says

I found this book engrossing, and very close to nature due to his observations. However, it is not an extreme, super-macho, edge-of-seat survivalist book, although through his preparations, daily attentiveness to detail, and tendency toward a bit of caution, he does survive a risky environment. It is not a fast read, it can lead to much introspection while sitting on a rock in the cold, wind and rain with Robert. It is not a pretty story about a man who walks into the woods and comes back a brand new man. It is a story about a human with all his flaws, and his observations in and/or about nature, weather, pain, fear, bliss, life, death, and an outboard motor from hell.

A man working on his PhD, decides to spend a year in solitude in a remote area off the coast of Chile in the Patagonia Wilderness. He spent 3 months in solitude 25 years earlier and had experienced enlightenment-like feelings of bliss while alone in nature, and wanted to recapture that feeling and cure some of his "imperfections". A common goal of all perfectionists. His book is written in the form of log entries with 9 interludes that further explore issues related to his journey. This book is an exploration of the human condition from the viewpoint of his studies, biology and psychology, and his passion, spiritual development. All right up my alley!

Right away, I realized I would enjoy his journey because he claimed to have control issues, was a self-proclaimed perfectionist, with a history of relationship problems. He then embarked on his journey with a kitten he picked up on the way.... not a recipe for success when heading into an environment where focus and inner peace are the goal, and a cat along to override his control of anything! I knew then he would be experiencing the same hellish introspection I have encountered since bringing a cat into my life 16 years ago, and I wasn't in a survival situation in extreme weather conditions.

The author has many issues, but he seems to be aware of all of them. This is typical of those on a spiritual journey who read a lot, and look inward. (Many on a spiritual journey read a lot, but only look outward....) He is aware of his fear of judgement, and that he himself judges the authors of the books he discusses along the way. He is aware of the projection of his fear and pain on the weather. He is aware of his hostility and lack of patience with the cat, and does a lot of soul searching on the topic. At one point he nails the issue in a log entry, which I recognized because I've been there, but doesn't seem to connect the two (in writing anyhow). I actually talked to the book, "Yes, that's it! He's the same as you!" Then he moved on....not sure if he understood the parallel then, or later, but he slowly made his peace with Cat over the year. He is also aware of how he treats women, which he admits isn't good, but his awareness and desire to change score him a few points.... he does some psychological exploration on that topic in the book and is brutally honest with his feelings.

He read many interesting books and discussed some at length during his year in isolation. The reading list he offers at the end is fantastic. Below are a few of the thoughts he pondered along the way, riding out the storms in his tarp-walled "cabin":

"Often I project my pain and fear out onto the world so I can have the comforting illusion of possible escape. 'If I go to a warm dry climate, the pain will stop. If the wind dies, so will my fear.' But there will be other pain and other fear, and the need to escape will never end. My task here is to make peace with pain and fear and to realize that, finally, there is no possibility of escape because there is no real separation between the world and me." - Robert Kull

"Through their (Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela) empirical studies in neuroscience, they came to realize that human beings do not have direct access to a supposed objective reality; each of us has a particular perspective dependent on physiology, culture, and personal history. We do not live in a universe, but in a multiverse."

"Our language has wisely sensed the two sides of being alone. It has created the word loneliness to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word solitude to express the glory of being alone." - Paul Tillich

"When we cling to the results of our actions as our only source of self-identification, then we become possessive and defensive and tend to look at our fellow human beings more as enemies to be kept at a distance than as friends, with whom we share the fights of life....In solitude we become aware that our worth is not the same as our usefulness." - Father Henri Nouwen

"It's as though these are separate worldviews and personalities. One loves security, my own nest, friends and lovers, peer respect, etc. When in that mode, the thought of wandering homeless and alone, with all the fears and discomforts, frightens me. Yet once I set off, I love being 'out there', and the comforts and relationships I've left behind lose importance. Then, in some vital way there isn't any 'out there'. It's all right wherever I am." - Robert Kull

"I also read books this way. At first I'm just distantly engaged with the ideas, then little by little I begin to consider how they relate to my own journey. Often, I imagine that books are supposed to be perfect. But, they are written by people just trying to make sense of their lives." - Robert Kull

Aaron Terrazas says

What a lucid, powerful and honest book.

William Liggett says

This unusual book is essentially a journal written to fulfill a PhD requirement in interdisciplinary studies at the University of British Columbia. Imagine if Thoreau had set up camp on the shore of an isolated island in Patagonia off the coast of southern Chile—hard to think of a more remote place.

Robert Kull was determined to record his inner reactions and outer efforts at survival living for a year absolutely alone (except for a cat he picked up on the way there). It sounded like a crazy idea but one that led to moments of extreme peace, self-doubt, agitation, frustration, anger, and spiritual awakening. Kull's thoughts and feelings were amplified by the total lack of distractions and the absolute aloneness. He read deep philosophical works to keep his mind active. He would occasionally skip days of writing to lose himself in savoring the moment.

I came away from reading this book with an admiration for someone who would undertake such a challenge. But I can't imagine many would be drawn to follow his example. On the other, hand I think we all have periods in our hectic lives when experiencing solitude seems like a refreshing change.

Leslie says

A grad student preparing his dissertation on the effects of extreme solitude on a person, Bob heads off to Patagonia to be alone for a year. This book is a collection of his journals primarily as well as some inserted sections where he talks about spiritual growth, technology etc. It is an interesting read and, after thinking about it, I really felt like I was there with him, rather than just reading about it. It is part nature writing as he experiences the elements, observes/studies birds, limpets etc., part challenge (as he tackles the realities of surviving out there, and part inner-journey where he discusses all of the things going through his head. It is a well-balanced book as well as being realistic. I have never spent the amount of time in the wilderness but I can relate to the expectation that time in the wilderness/nature is "supposed" to produce some sort of spiritual enlightenment. His is an honest journey and I was able to relate much of it to my own journey.
