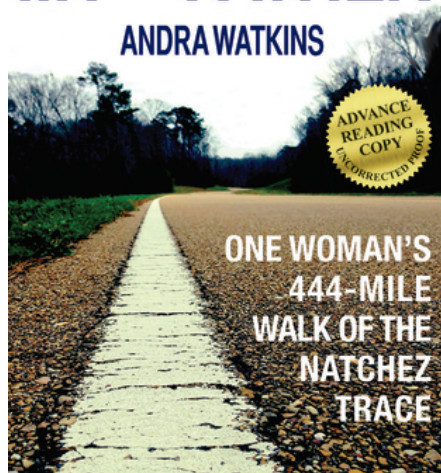


NOT WITHOUT MY FATHER

ANDRA WATKINS



Not Without My Father: One Woman's 444-Mile Walk of the Natchez Trace

Andra Watkins

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Not Without My Father: One Woman's 444-Mile Walk of the Natchez Trace Andra Watkins

Can an epic adventure succeed without a hero? Andra Watkins needs a wingman to help her become the first living person to walk the historic 444-mile Natchez Trace as the pioneers did. Fifteen miles of rugged highway each day for thirty-four days.

After striking-out with everyone in her life, she settles upon her disinterested eighty-year-old father. And his gas. The sleep apnea machine and self-scratching. Sharing a bathroom with a man whose gut obliterates his aim. Her father is every grown child's nightmare of embarrassing behavior. They've never gotten along.

As Watkins trudges America's forgotten highway, she loses herself in despair and pain. Her tenuous connection to her father unravels in a series of epic misunderstandings. Will they finish the trip and turn 'I wish I had' into 'I'm glad I did?' Or will they kill each other?

***Not Without My Father: One Woman's 444-Mile Walk of the Natchez Trace* is a *New York Times* best selling memoir for everyone who suffers from shattered dreams and dysfunctional relationships. If you like Cheryl Strayed, Bill Bryson, or Elizabeth Gilbert, you'll love this humorous, heartbreaking memoir from *New York Times* best selling author Andra Watkins.**

Buy *Not Without My Father* today and discover your next favorite read!

Not Without My Father: One Woman's 444-Mile Walk of the Natchez Trace Details

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From Reader Review Not Without My Father: One Woman's 444-Mile Walk of the Natchez Trace for online ebook

Liz Yon) says

I rarely read memoir, but being a dedicated fan of Andra Watkins's work, I stepped outside my reading box and sat down with her tale of her amazing trek along the 444-mile Natchez Trace, accompanied by her 80-year old father. I'm so glad I did! The feat of walking the Trace would have been enough to make a fascinating read (and, to play on words, Ms. Watkins's feet certainly gave their all for the venture). But, *Not Without My Father* delivers the surprise, and the emotional wallop, of another story interwoven with that of the hike. It is the story of a father and daughter, finding each other beyond the wall of their own bumpy history; beyond the differences in their perspectives and approaches to life. They found solidarity in conquering the long journey along the Natchez Trace, both of them battling to finish what they'd begun despite poor health and injury, insane weather and unforeseen obstacles. With unvarnished honesty, Ms. Watkins tells the story of how they reached the end of the Trace, together and supporting one another. Her voice, always genuine, is amused, cranky, and filled with wonder by turns. I laughed aloud by page two, and I shed a fair measure of tears, too, by the end. *Not Without my Father* is a gorgeous, powerful paen to the ties that bind sweetest, even when they chafe.

Donofalltrades says

I went into this book expecting very little because I knew nothing of the Natchez Trace Parkway and even less about this author, and besides, how riveting can a 444 mile walk be?

Well, not since Stephen King's "The Long Walk" has a book about a person walking down a road ever been so awesome to read. I don't know how many others there are in the road walking upon genre, but this book was one of those I couldn't put down.

For me, the joy of the book was identifying myself and my own family with those in the book. As not only the son of a man who was stingy with praise, but the father of a daughter who has to try harder than he should to make sure she knows how much I love her, I appreciated a lot of what the struggles in this book were about.

This book is about relationships and making sure that we find time to be with the ones we love, if even only for small amounts of time, like a day trip or just calling a friend for dinner.

The trip is somehow put on the back burner because what's going on with the characters is so well written, but at the end of the day, Andra's walk along the trail is an amazing feat of mental and physical endurance as well.

Shante says

I leave this book feeling full of gratitude for the beautiful souls who light my life and conscious of the moments. I am a fan! I was so enchanted by Andra's story: her resilience throughout her journey, her determination, her relationship with her parents. I expected this book to be a good read, but never would I have imagined it to be soul rocking. Sometimes you have to stop and smell the roses (or smog, whatever just take it all in). Because we only have one life to live and memories won't create themselves. I can't thank Andra enough for sharing her story with me. I am inspired.

In terms of review: in a nutshell, it's the story of a woman who walks the entirety of the Natchez Trace Parkway (442 miles). On her journey her life transitions and she finds herself appreciating the moments and the people. Simple yet beautiful read.

At the end she encourages her readers to make memories and share them on social media with the hashtag #NWMFMakeaMemory. Will be doing!

Robert Johnson says

Superficially this book is a departure for Ms. Watkins. Her first book is a historico/romance/gothic/ghost story with a twist, i.e. a novel. An excellent and rollicking tale, indeed.

Not Without My Father is a travelogue, personal reflection, and true adventure wrapped up in the form of a memoir. It too is excellent. When the book is published I already know I am getting three copies to give to significant people in my family.

Yet in the end both books have a common theme. A girl/woman searching for her father, looking for connection, protection, understanding, and the ability to separate while growing close.

For the rest, it is well written, gripping, and well worth your time. Both books are well worth your time.

Michael Carnell says

I kept having to stop while reading "Not Without My Father". I kept having to stop and think. I was thinking of my own father and other people in my life who I have taken for granted or not spent the time with that I should.

While there are quite a few good laughs in this book, it is not a bouncy rainbows and unicorns type family story. It is an honest look at a hard personal journey of discovery and connections that is mirrored the author's own person journey to walk the Natchez Trace. Her father accompanies her on that walk, via comfortable car of course, to guide, protect and promote her. As any dad should. But this is not so easy a relationship. Along the way old wounds are revealed and feelings left unsaid, both good and bad, are voiced. And then there is mom. Mom throws a whole other spice in to the brew.

As I read "Not Without My Father" I thought about my dad. And just as importantly I thought about both my son and daughter. I had to pause to wonder what baggage I was leaving them with, and what tools as well to help them on their journey. Were the experiences I shared with my family, all of my family, what I really wanted to leave them with. And most importantly, had I been present in their lives? Was I there, paying attention, and participating?

We can't blame all of our distractions on electronics. There have always been distractions - friends, work, reading, hobbies, golf, whatever. But the key is do we set aside these distractions to be with those people important to us. Or maybe include the family in our hobbies so it is a time of bonding instead of separation?

But I digress away from this book. I guess that is because this is the type of book it is - a book to be read on multiple levels. You can read the story of Andra Watkins's walk and the experiences and people, but you can also read the story of a personal journey. A journey of discovery and growth. And from there you can find lessons for your own life.

I highly recommend this book, but more so I recommend you read it and then discuss it with those important to you.

Carrie says

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the audiobook version of this book on a long car drive over the holidays. Hearing about the author's struggles in her daily 15-mile walks as she traveled the Natchez Trace by foot kept me plowing ahead in my own long travels. The memoir is both humorous and touching as the author makes the 444-mile journey with her father in tow (he drives the car to pick her up at the end of the day's walk). During the 34-day journey, their sometimes troubled relationship comes to a head, as does the author's relationship with her mother, who joins them for the final weeks. Though we all have different life circumstances, many readers will relate to the issues of aging parents and complicated family dynamics.

The author narrates the book herself and does a beautiful job. There's also a nice interview with the author at the end as well as a touching discussion by her father about his experience in the 1961 University of Georgia riot sparked by desegregation.

"Not Without My Father" is a great book that will make you laugh, think, feel, and relate.

Tori says

Having rewritten Meriwether Lewis's final steps, the author sets out to retrace history by trekking the entire span of The Natchez Trace. As she forges ahead, reader & hiker alike begin to cultivate a deep understanding & appreciation for the brutal, beautiful experience of traveling through an unknown wilderness alone, relying only on self & skies & the occasional pick-me-up sight of a field of daffodils.

Ever present on the sidelines is Andra's larger-than-life father, Roy. As she forces herself to acknowledge & honor the quirks & hardships of herself and those who hiked The Trace before her, the reader glimpses a softening towards her father. What begins as a desire to try not to "kill each other" for the duration of the author's hike subtly weaves into a calm understanding of his history, his hardships, his quirks and how they have shaped him as a father & her as his daughter. As The Trace winds on, the reader is treated to a parallel journey: a writer moving towards the end of a personal test of endurance, a daughter moving towards a personal test of love & acceptance.

This book is the very best kind of story: real, human, funny and bittersweet and refreshingly honest. It is a love letter to those we don't fully understand, the kind that starts with "I can't stand you" and ends with "I can't stand to be without you". A breathtaking piece of work.

Aguess says

This was an advanced reader copy. In the effort of full disclosure, I am described in this memoir/travelogue. Acting as Watkin's wingman for the first week of her epic journey. That being said - I loved this book. It is an illuminating portrait of the evolution of her relationship with her parents that parallels her journey through the epicenter of American history, traditions, and landscape that is the Natchez Trace. Andra invests her tale with the warmth, humor and grace that she observed in her parents lives. Through her account of the trials and joys of her own life journey with her larger than life Dad and her Southern Belle mom, Andra urges us to brave our own familial demons and go out and make stories with our loved ones. Absolutely worth the trip!

C-shaw says

I don't like this woman OR her father, don't appreciate her cynical and uncharitable view of her family, don't respect her motivations for the 444-mile walk nor her poor-me outlook on her privileged (in my estimation) life; nevertheless, the story of her walk is very interesting to me, and neither did/do I like ole Cheryl Strayed, but I very much enjoyed reading Wild also. Let's see whether I change my opinion by the end of the book. . . . Oh yes, at the risk of being overly critical, a trait I abjure in other reviewers, neither do I like her overblown use of ellipses either (girl, the rule is three if you're leaving out a sentence or less, and four if more than one sentence, not a half-dozen for emphasis) and her constant, gross referral to her damaged feet as being filled with "puss." The word is "pus," you putz! Gee, that was quite a rant for someone who doesn't like mean people, isn't it? Bottom line is I am enjoying the book quite a lot, believe it or not!!

* * * * *

Okay, I'm finished, and I didn't really change my opinion. Andra Watkins writes well and I liked hearing about her journey, but she told such horrid things about her parents - personal bathroom things that shouldn't be mentioned in public - and was hyper-critical of both, all the while talking about how she loved them and craved being closer to her father. She put the onus on him for their unconnected relationship, but perhaps she should consider her own culpability. She was a good enough writer than I looked at her book about Meriwether Lewis, thinking I might read it. . . . Well, it's not a biography, but rather an imagined reincarnation of him in current times. What the hay? I ain't going there, sorry, Andra.

Cheryl Smithem says

Andra Watkins' frank self-appraisal* of her walk, ostensibly to promote her previous book, *To Live Forever*, is a self-revelation with deep heart.

Andra chose to hike the paved Natchez Trace and found herself hiking into her family--farts and all. She chose her father as her constant companion--hoping he would help her with the daily ground work of getting on with it. During the course of her 444 (or 442 mile) walk, she learns more about herself, connects with her family history, the natural world and learns to slow down, to hear the birds and the whispers of history.

She completes her walk with a new appreciation of the brief span that we each have on this planet, partly inspired by the story of Meriwether Lewis and in part by her father, Roy Lee Watkins. Andra realizes that

our connections are all that we have tying us to this realm. She comprehends that to know ourselves is to know our families. She learns that as much as we hope that we can endure the body's frailty, that at some point in our future, we all must prepare to meet our ending.

Andra finds herself with broken, bruised, abused feet at her walk's end but with a new understanding of what endurance really is.

*Note: I had an advance reading copy of this book.

John W. Howell says

Not Without My Father by Andra Watkins is part memoir and part a chronicle of an amazing journey along the 444 mile Natchez Trace. The story itself could stand on its own as a mesmerizing tale of an adventure of a forty-five-year-old women coming to grips with her conflicted feelings about her parents. Yet even more is added with the observations of the trace itself as well as the historical context which Ms. Watkins describes so well.

She asks her father to accompany her on the adventure as a wingman of sorts. He reluctantly agrees but thinks it will not be much fun. The reader gets the opinion early on that father and daughter do not necessarily see eye to eye on what is best for the other. It could be each is most concerned with what is best for them. So it is no surprise when the father seems taken with his own importance and the daughter regretting the fact he is along since she thought the father would be more attentive to her needs. As the story unfolds it is clear Father and daughter have not been very good at conveying their love for each other. The trip then becomes an adventure in discovery of how each feels at their time of life. The good news is the trip also brings out a strong desire in both to make memories of the here and now.

This is a very strongly composed and a very well crafted book. The story flows with a pace that keeps the action moving from one marker to the next. Ms. Watkins has taken the technique of telling scenarios in the story from two perspectives and it works quite well. The reader gets a real sense of understanding both sides of each issue as articulated by the father and the daughter. There is an element of suspense in that there is a possibility that things won't work out due to the strong personalities involved.

I would recommend this book to all readers as it contains elements of each genre which will delight those who have a favorite. There are whimsy and thrilling moments. The whole story seems like a tale that was crafted to stand a significant test of time. I believe this book will be read by future generations and will benefit from some of the lessons in patience and understanding as well as a sense of the difficulty surrounding the original trek by Meriwether Lewis.

Lisa says

Full disclosure: I appear in this book. It's a little surreal reading about your own experience through the eyes of another person--someone whom you had only met in the virtual world of blog writing, and yet who you spontaneously decided to join on what was, perhaps, one of the biggest adventures of her life. I had many reasons to join Andra on the Natchez Trace, but that is a story for another time, another place (another memoir?).

I also, don't know how to review a person's memoir. How do you comment on someone's memory or

interpretation of their own life experience? How do you respond to something so personal as the journey of a woman who simultaneously walks the 444 mile Natchez Trace and redefines her relationship with her aging father in powerful and life changing ways?

I think the only way you can really respond to someone else's memoir is by how much you connect with the journey and the hidden lessons inside it. I have read memoirs that seem like pure self-indulgence, where I cannot see or understand the universal life lessons and just felt like I was reading someone's private journal. Andra's story is not like that. She is honest, and shares many private (and sometimes disturbing moments) but it is in that honesty that we can find the truths that we all understand and can relate to too:

*the dream of doing something that leaves our mark on the world

*for writers the unspoken fantasy that somehow we will beat the odds and wake up one day as best selling authors

*the yearning to feel love and share special moments with our parents

*the fears we face as we watch them age, and feel our lives stretching forward and backward.

Andra's book does all these things and more. My tears started flowing during my own chapter in it--not just because of my own memories but because I realized a truth that touches my life. I am "without my father" and I so wish I wasn't.

This book is for anyone who has a dream, but fears the journey. It is for anyone who struggles to find meaning in life. I am honored to have been even the smallest part of that, and it gives me hope that somehow I'll carve my own path. However, I most likely won't walk 444 miles to do it.

Melinda says

After reading her debut novel *To Live Forever*, I instantly became an Andra Watkins fan. Her story of Meriwether Lewis and the Natchez Trace left an impression. Needless to say, when I learned of her next endeavor chronicling her actual walk of the Natchez Trace, I was anxious to read of her courageous and bold adventure.

"I almost forgot about my book. I risked my life to convince people to try my novel, because I thought if I demonstrated dedication to my story, a few more people might read it."

I have the utmost respect for Andra Watkins accomplishing her goal of walking the Natchez Trace solo, only her determination and endurance serving as her buttress. Physically and mentally demanding, emotions running high, Andra discovers inner peace as she pushes through her body's screams, her mettle tested, the uncooperative harshness of nature's elements. Her father serving as 'wingman' of sorts, their strained relationship revitalized and resuscitated as the journey bridges the fissure between these two spirited and stubborn individuals.

I appreciate Andra's candor with exposing her issues long held within regarding her parents. Capable writing skills, feelings in black and white font add tenderness to an already sentimental narrative. Her quick wit, wry humor and huge heart endear her to readers. Her father is a hoot, truly a one-man-show. No doubt the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. With all certitude Andra has material for a novel based solely on her father, his stories alone worthy of sharing, a man larger than life possessing a very vibrant personality. I enjoyed the intimate glimpse of these two rebuilding their rented bond.

A story I found inspiring on a physical as well as emotional level. Andra excelled in making a memory singularly and plurally.

Cynda says

Andra Watkins is a Force of Nature. She may be a Force of Spirit, a tormented Indigo Child.

Her personal demons call her to action, inspire her to walk the Natchez Trace, inspire her to invite her parents, let her meet others who have lived near the Trail or who have walked the Trail.

I read this book because I wanted to re-live my past. I had a love affair with The Trace. Carl's father and I picnicked, barbecued, hiked, danced, honored, laughed, and cried--and smoked a bit--in the areas off the paved Trace, on the Old Trace, in the ghost towns/near ghost towns on the bluffs of the Old Trace. One can never go back. Those times are past. They are locked in my memory and my heart.

So I decided to read someone else's experience on the Natchez Trace. Even if the experience was--so disappointing--on the paved parkway. Yet there are no other I-walked-the-Natchez-Trace memoirs that I know of. So I went with what was available.

Where I wanted to read how she interacted with others walking the Trace or with others visiting the sights, I read how the Trace has been dishonored by almost no funds, almost no protection for those travelling the Trace, many of the sights and sites have been shuttered. In the 1980s The Trace was a mix of tourists, regular visitors, and staff--a fluid yet stable community of people.

Good News. Watkins does provide suggestions at the end of her book of how to support the continuance of the Trace.

Businesses remain. But they too have changed. I followed all of Watkins stops on Google. Some are more dilapidated and some are changed in nature. What was a popular stopping place--authentic-ish Gibbes old country store at Learned, MS--has changed in nature into a restaurant with atmosphere. You can get atmosphere at many Anywhere USA restaurants.

I did appreciate how Spirit encouraged Watkins. A red cardinal came several times to her to encourage her to continue on or to step this way. Voices that belonged to both the long-dead inhabitants of the area and long-dead travellers of the Trace spoke with her, mostly sharing what Watkins calls "secrets". I believe they were feeding her spiritual vitamins and she was gobbling them up. Mostly. They did call her out one time, telling her that she is failing to hear their suggestion about how to travel over a bridge. We all need to get called out sometimes.

Being the Indigo Introvert that I am, I would not have well tolerated others travelling with me. I would recognize such an opportunity to walk the Trace to be a sacred gift, one given to me, an opportunity to commune with Spirit.

Seems Watkins was on a different path. Imagine. So seems that the time had come for Watkins to make some peace with her parents. The parents supported and watched over her. Her mother even walked with her some of the days, some of the time.

This was a spiritual vitamin-packed journey. I am glad I went on this (reading) journey to learn some of my own secret lessons but also to know that the Natchez Trace needs support. The Trace is part of my personal history, a personal love. What will I do for her, I wonder.

Rachel Watkins says

I love memoirs and this one hit close to home. I spent countless hours of my childhood as a passenger in a big yellow Chevy Impala on the Natchez Trace travelling from my home in Columbus, Mississippi to see my grandparents in Jackson, Mississippi. It was a route my parents travelled once month for years. Those rest stops, the sign for French Camp, the historic signs - these memories are the fabric of my childhood. Andra Watkins's memoir of her walking the Natchez Trace is one of family secrets, family folklore, and finally coming to realize what her father's stories truly meant. I loved it!
