



Almost Anywhere: Road Trip Ruminations on Love, Nature, National Parks, and Nonsense

Krista Schlyer

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At twenty-eight years old, Krista Schlyer sold almost everything she owned and packed the rest of it in a station wagon bound for the American wild. Her two best friends joined her—one a grumpy, grieving introvert, the other a feisty dog—and together they sought out every national park, historic site, forest, and wilderness they could get to before their money ran out or their minds gave in.

The journey began as a desperate escape from urban isolation, heartbreak, and despair, but became an adventure beyond imagining. Chronicling their colorful escapade, *Almost Anywhere* explores the courage, cowardice, and heroics that live in all of us, as well as the life of nature and the nature of life.

This eloquent and accessible memoir is at once an immersion in the pain of losing someone particularly close and especially young and a healing journey of a broken life given over to the whimsy and humor of living on the road.

Almost Anywhere will appeal to outdoor lovers, armchair travelers, and anyone struggling to find a way forward in life.

Early Reviews:

"Outstanding, wry, heart-wrenching and healing. Those words describe *Almost Anywhere*, which hits the bull's-eye as a cross between *Wild* and *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*. Krista's unique voice will draw you in and take you on journey to the intersection of unfathomable grief and the healing power of wanderlust." —Michelle Theall, author of *Teaching the Cat to Sit*

"Brave, beautiful, and utterly captivating, *Almost Anywhere* breaks your heart and puts it back together again on a long and often arduous road trip across an America where the uncertain future is always just beyond the horizon and the immutable past rushes at you without remorse. Measuring the sharpness of loss against the hugeness of life, Krista Schlyer has found her way, page by page, to a rare state of grace. An amazing book." —William Souder, author of *Under a Wild Sky*, *A Plague of Frogs* and *On a Farther Shore*.

Almost Anywhere: Road Trip Ruminations on Love, Nature, National Parks, and Nonsense Details

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National Parks, and Nonsense Krista Schlyer**

From Reader Review Almost Anywhere: Road Trip Ruminations on Love, Nature, National Parks, and Nonsense for online ebook

Kristen says

In this funny, heartbreaking, and ultimately redemptive memoir, Krista Schlyer invites her readers on a cross-country journey from loss to hope. Along the way, she guides us through dozens of America's state and national parks and introduces us to the many species whose land we've come to occupy. Schlyer's writing is warm and witty; self-effacing and honest, she's the kind of writer and narrator a reader connects with easily, even if many of us have never faced the trials that inspired her trip.

The real triumph of the book, though, is the way Schlyer traces the birth of her own environmental consciousness. We see bison, seals, and giant, giant trees nudging back to life and helping her discover the possibility of love and life after death; only by helping save the natural world can she imagine moving forward. Her regard for nature not only inspires, it also makes a great story.

Clay Bolt says

The most insightful books always seem to come at exactly the right time. One thing that they all share in common is a powerful mix of personal narrative, humor, and the kind of deep thinking that speaks to me not only while I'm burning through their pages, but for the days and weeks that follow. Almost Anywhere will take you on an unforgettable journey through America's National Parks—some more familiar than others—and deep within the landscape of beautiful lives touched by wonder, tragedy, and ultimately redemption.

Karen says

I've been zipping through books this year, but took my time with this one. There's so much that's really good about this book. After significant personal losses, Krista and Bill sell nearly everything and head out in a station wagon with a tent, a year's worth of rice and sauce packets and a funny little dog to embark on an adventure of healing and discovery. I expected bits about the various parks they visited along the way, but got so much more. The book is at times touching and heartfelt as they work through their pain, but also has its funny moments (Maggie helps with that - as most dogs do). :-) We get a glimpse of a few of the characters they meet along the way as well. Well worth a read! I only wish there were more photos included. I guess I'll have to hit the road and see for myself someday...

Susan Hanson says

"Over the years, I have learned to find sustenance where there is scarcity," photojournalist Krista Schlyer writes in Almost Anywhere. "In the bend of dune grass under an ocean breeze. A solid rock for luncheon rest on a sunny peak. The wings of a heron reflected in low flight over the Anacostia River." In these and more, Schlyer has discovered what it means to walk the tenuous line between exquisite joy and mind-numbing pain. As her readers, we are invited to join her on that precarious walk.

It is tempting to draw comparisons here—say, with John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley*, written more than 50 years ago. Each is an account of a yearlong road trip in search of an intangible something—in his case, the American character; in hers, a kind of serenity that only “this grand, graceful Earth can give.”

Instead of Charley the standard poodle, however, Schlyer travels with a “big-eared furry runt of a dog” named Maggie and a curmudgeonly friend named Bill. Also unlike Steinbeck, who allegedly fabricated many of his encounters with colorful strangers, Schlyer does indeed meet a number of eccentric types, including a naked old man near a hot spring in Utah. And whereas Steinbeck only talked about camping in national parks along the way, Schlyer and her companions actually do so—in deserts and mountain forests, amid swarms of mosquitos and in the company of loons. Only on those rare occasions when she can convince Bill to loosen his grip on the purse strings do they deign to stay in a motel. This is, after all, a pilgrimage, not a relaxing vacation.

Just as Schlyer’s journey takes her across the breadth of the country, it also takes her through an emotional and spiritual landscape fraught with extremes—awe in the presence of great beauty, desolation in the wake of great loss. Daniel, the love of her life, has died, and Krista must learn how to carry on. Similarly adrift, Bill must reorient himself; in losing Daniel, he has lost his best friend. Having sold most of their possessions, pooled their money, and bought a car, Krista and Bill set out on the road toward healing, and in the process, sort out their own relationship and set a new course. Maggie just goes along for the ride.

Almost Anywhere: Road Trip Ruminations on Love, Nature, National Parks, and Nonsense is everything the title suggests. Fifteen years in the making, this memoir is at the same time lyrical and plainspoken, laugh-out-loud funny and wise. Deeply moving in places, it rings true for anyone who has ever experienced profound grief. It also stirs the wanderlust in us all, that desire to explore, to get in the car and go.

More than anything, though, Schlyer reminds us of what the natural world can teach us, not just about finitude and loss, about the cycle of which we’re a part, but also about grace.

It is while standing a mere 15 feet from a herd of bison in Yellowstone National Park that Schlyer sees where this trip has been taking her. She is afraid at first, and she should be; at 500 pounds apiece, this herd could kill her in an instant. When she shifts her position between the bison and the river, they shift as well. “I can either think my way out of such close proximity to these giants or draw a halt to my rising panic,” she writes. She chooses the latter.

Schlyer’s epiphany comes when the herd simply ignores her as they make their way to the river. “I am nothing to them,” she realizes, “a moth, a varmint, beneath notice. But they have given me back my life, pressed paddles to my heart and (clear!) drummed me with electric shock. I have not been so alive for years, perhaps never.”

Although she will continue to carry the wound of Daniel’s loss, Schlyer has also been given a gift: the knowledge that, like this remnant herd of bison, grazing as bison have done for eons, she, too, can carry on. In being ignored by the brute power of the universe, she has gained “liberation from self-pity.”

Later, Schlyer is able to put words to this experience. It was at that moment, she explains, that she discovered her vocation for speaking for the natural world. “If the bison can hold on and hold fast to his work on the landscape until the landscape itself is returned to him,” she observes, “then maybe I can rebound from hopelessness by helping him try to get there—however I can.”

Fortunately for her readers, Schlyer has made good on this promise, giving us a remarkable body of work in her photographs and words.

Jodi Beder says

A captivating read, serious, funny and entertaining. Krista Schlyer's "Almost Anywhere" is a probing journey book that combines the personal (a journey through loss and grief) with the public - in this case, with a focus on natural history and the environment; the mapping is both internal/psychic and geographic. The book also artfully balances reverence for nature and the seriousness of grief with absurdity, irreverence and laugh-aloud humor, as often as not aimed by the author at herself. Her very three-dimensional travel companions, Bill and Maggie, add enormously to the book's vitality. A wonderful new contribution by an important conservation photographer, writer, and speaker.

Lily says

I read Almost Anywhere a few days ago, but I can't stop thinking about its beauty and depth. Never before has a book made me laugh and then cry, and then start laughing while I am crying. This book is worth reading for the funny moments alone, but the humor is a small gift compared to the greater gifts shared.

Denise says

Last year I read another book about somebody driven mad by grief trying to cope by embarking on a Project. "H is for Hawk" is a better book than this, and certainly less preachy. But Schlyer's account of going through David's death from cancer hits home with me, and her National Park roadtrip recalls past camping trips of my own. She's at her best describing the actual events of the trip: trying to sleep in the smelly station wagon when no campsite is found, soaking in the hot springs with naked weirdos, trying to keep the dachshund from taking on a javelina, spending Christmas with her grandma. When she describes the places she goes, she veers from paragraphs of history that seem ripped from wikipedia to self-consciously poetic paeans of environmentalism.

Evidently the experience changed her life, and I applaud her willingness to be honest about her emotional journey.

Cat Lazaroff says

Almost Anywhere is astonishingly lyrical, gut-bustingly funny, and tremendously moving. It's a reminder of the healing, transformative power of nature. If you've never felt the numinous astonishment of walking in a wood with no human sounds but your own footsteps, this book will give you that vicarious experience from your armchair. But more than that - it will inspire you to seek out your own paths into places full of beauty.

Oh, and it's full of beautiful scenes from some of the best parts of the U.S. Krista Schlyer takes us there on her own personal journey of healing, of mourning and finding love. Travel with her - you won't regret it.

Marilyn says

There was much that appealed to me about this book, the biggest thing being "national parks," which my husband and I have spent many years "collecting." And "road trip ruminations" was also a draw since I seem to ruminate often. A funny thing happened as I began reading, though. They started in New Buffalo, Michigan, and began traveling EAST. Well, I couldn't understand that; I live in New Hampshire and we always head WEST when we travel. How could they go the wrong way? But as I kept reading it became clear that they were going to do a clockwise loop rather than counter-clockwise, which we prefer. Isn't it crazy how those kinds of things stick in one's brain? (Still, it would have been great to see a map of their travels.)

The book description said that this trip was born out of tragedy, and in one place, Krista observes, "I consider my life ahead. there could be thirty-one more years for me, or more. What if they are even half as difficult as the past three? My spirit shrinks to exhaustion at the thought of bearing all that could come." (Loc 3801) This passage resonated with me and was one reason I chose to read the book. The last three years in my own life have also been fraught with grief and personal tragedy. The tragic events in her life were over when she took her journey; mine are not, and so I can only hope that I will also rise above it all and continue to go forward.

Maureen Dowd says

The author's unique insights (related to herself and her beloveds, her journey from despair to hope, her understanding of nature and the universe), are all presented in a style that is honest, beautiful and highly relatable.

When a book can cause one to laugh out loud, to be blinded by tears, and to come away with a better understanding of one's place in the scheme of things, it's well worth reading more than once, and maybe in a book club.

I wish everyone who has been significant to me in my life, everyone I care about, could read this book and keep it nearby to reread from time to time as needed.

Susan Tweit says

Award-winning photojournalist and wilderness advocate Krista Schlyer was 28 years old, living in Washington, DC, and stuck in a disabling fog of grief after losing her husband to cancer when her best friend Bill—also her late husband's best friend—phoned and said, "We both need to get out of here. Way out."

He thought we should go out on the road, to all those national parks and wild lands, as many as we could get to for as long as we could manage to stay away. We'd go by car, sleep in a tent, eat cheap noodles and canned beans, whatever it took.

So the two bought a used Saturn station wagon (because it got good gas mileage and they could sleep in the back in a pinch), sold their respective belongings, and hit the road. With them they took Maggie, Schlyer's Corgi-Dachshund cross, the "cutest dog on the planet," who possessed a master nose for expensive cheese and an ability to charm anyone, even Bill.

Almost Anywhere, Schlyer's memoir of that year spent searching for "a place to be both broken and whole at the same time," is a wry and lyrical contribution to the classic American literature of road-trip stories. It is a portrait of numbing grief gradually thawed by moments of heart-stopping beauty: the eerie call of a loon from a north-country lake; the passage of a herd of bison almost close enough to touch, the huge animals supremely unfazed by human presence.

What lifts this tale above other journey stories is Schlyer's combination of honesty and humor, her ability to shift seamlessly from the grandeur of the places they visit to the mundane struggles of two humans with serious emotional baggage dealing with the less glamorous aspects of exploring America's wild places, from clouds of voracious mosquitoes to the chipmunk who stows away with them.

How could any reader resist a story that pins you through the heart with its exquisite truths and also leaves you rolling on the floor laughing? Almost Anywhere is not perfect, but it is a great read.

Excerpted from Story Circle Book Reviews (a featured Editor's Choice review):
<http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org...>

Angie says

This is the best memoir I have ever read. Most memoirs/autobiographies, understandably, have a "this is all about me!" feel to them, but I never felt that about this book. Schlyer is simply a guide to her experiences on the road, switching beautifully from funny to profound to informative.

Grief is difficult to write about, but Schlyer rocks it. I feel like I took this journey with her, from the crushing weight of losing someone you love to realizing that, yes, grief is huge, but life is bigger. This isn't so much a book about adventures as a portrayal of life, and finding a way to live it. And Schlyer does it in an intelligent but humble way.

And of course you can't have great literature without great characters. It's impossible not to love Krista, Daniel, Bill, and Maggie. The book does get a bit environmentalist at the end, but that's just a small complaint about a book I really, really loved.

Kevin Kizer says

"I set out on the road to find magic in quiet places to cushion the hard edges of grief, and I have, beyond my wildest hopes. But I am also becoming acquainted with an entirely new source of grief as I come to understand the devastation we have wrought on the natural world." This to me felt like a nice summary of this wonderful memoir by Krista Schlyer. Look for my review soon on ThePeorian.com.

Bridget Pooley says

Beautifully written memoir, captivates the reader. I love the way Krista entwines the past and present in the story, pulling the reader along. I laughed and I cried (a lot!) as I was transported from one amazing scene to another. Thank you for sharing your story, Krista.

Amy Gulick says

Deep love. Deep loss. In the fog of pain, Krista Schlyer struggles to see her way forward. Seeking solace where trees tower, buffalo roam, and mountains humble, Schlyer faces and embraces life, warts and all, with sobs, smiles, and a quirky little dog.
