

DON'T CALL ME MRS ROGERS



LOVE, LOATHING & OUR EPIC
DRIVE AROUND THE WORLD



PAIGE PARKER

“Full of heart and insight... Paige is the modern-day princess and dragon slayer—full of grit, guts and grace.”

—Jaelle Ang, entrepreneur and CEO of The Great Room

“A charming, engaging memoir that’s hard to put down, with pages of insightful gems about womanhood, motherhood and staying true to one’s inner calling.”

—Dolores Au, CEO and co-founder of *Mummyfique*

“For those who thrive by saying yes, who keep their eyes open to all that life has to offer, this book is a wake-up call...”

—Geoffrey Kent, author of *Safari: A Memoir of a Worldwide Travel Pioneer* and founder of Abercrombie & Kent

“A fascinating peek into the extraordinary world of Paige Parker (wife, mother, feminist), this memoir is like no other round-the-world journal.”

—Dr Jade Kua, president of the Association of Women Doctors (Singapore)

“Proof that just like books, we can never judge the kind of experiences a person has had and how it can come to define them.”

—Tracy Phillips, director of Ppurpose

“A truly inspiring read. I can only hope that my two girls will grow up with the same thirst for adventure and excitement as Paige has.”

—Charmaine Seah-Ong, co-founder of Elementary

“Paige’s brave and soulful stories are much more than a whirlwind traveller’s tale; they are a reminder of the sometimes harsh truth about this world we live in.”

—Pocket Sun, co-founder and managing partner of SoGal Ventures

“An engaging tale filled with laughter, tears and the forthright observations we wish our own mothers might have had the temerity to fill us in on.”

—Su-Lyn Tan, co-founder and CEO of The Ate Group

“Intimately written and beautifully crafted... This is a story to inspire legions of women and men to take that plunge and go forth into the unknown.”

—Su Shan Tan, group head of wealth management and consumer banking at DBS

“Wisdom so insightful, prose so simply beautiful, her memoir will leave every reader with indelible memories.”

—Lynn Yeow-de Vito, co-founder of Loop PR and *Sassy Mama Singapore*

*For my daughters, Happy and Bee, and for yours,
and for the countless drifters and dreamers
who will slay many dragons on the road
to self-fulfilment, equality and independence.*

Copyright © 2018 by Paige Parker
Cover and author photos by Max Chan.
Wedding photos by Rebecca Flowerdew.
Used with permission.

All rights reserved
Published in Singapore by Epigram Books
shop.epigrambooks.sg

**National Library Board, Singapore
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

Name(s): Parker, Paige.

Title: Don't call me Mrs Rogers : love, loathing &
our epic drive around the world / Paige Parker.

Description: First edition. | Singapore : Epigram Books, [2018]

Identifier(s): OCN 1046985883 | ISBN 978-981-46-5525-5 (paperback) |
ISBN 978-981-46-5526-2 (ebook)

Subject(s): LCSH: Parker, Paige—Travel. | Automobile travel. |
Voyages around the world. | Americans—Singapore—
Social life and customs.

Classification: DDC 910.41—dc23

First Edition: October 2018
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DON'T CALL ME MRS ROGERS



LOVE, LOATHING & OUR EPIC
DRIVE AROUND THE WORLD



PAIGE PARKER



EPIGRAM
SINGAPORE • LONDON

CONTENTS

Prologue	1
Rocky Mount to NYC	5
Iceland to Turkey	13
Georgia to Azerbaijan	21
Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan	28
China	35
South Korea to Japan	42
Russia	48
Moscow to Riga, Latvia	57
Scandinavia to Italy	62
Rome to Henley-on-Thames, England	68
England to Western Sahara	77
Mauritania to Mali	87
Mali to Gabon	97
Gabon to Angola	106
Namibia to South Africa to Malawi	118
Mount Kilimanjaro	126



Ethiopia to Sudan	-131
Wadi Halfa, Sudan	-139
Egypt to Saudi Arabia	-144
Dubai to Karachi	-155
Pakistan to India	-165
Mumbai to Kolkata	-172
Dhaka, Bangladesh, to Northeast India	-179
Myanmar to Singapore to Indonesia	-187
East Timor to Australia to New Zealand	-194
Chile to Bolivia	-202
Bolivia to Peru to Nicaragua	-211
Honduras to Mexico to USA	-218
Rocky Mount to NYC	-224
Epilogue	-228
Afterword by Jim Rogers	-231
Map	-232
Packing List	-234
Music List	-236
Acknowledgements	-237

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry
and narrow-mindedness.”

—Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*

“Everyone thinks of changing the world
but no one thinks of changing himself.”

—Leo Tolstoy

PROLOGUE

I MEET A lot of people in my life. As a wife, a mother and an active participant in a slew of initiatives from local arts to global causes, I'm always out there.

If people were to judge me by my Instagram feed, they'd assume my life was all galas and openings, balls and benefits. And they wouldn't be totally wrong. I can't deny that I live a privileged life. I admit to loving pretty clothes and shiny bling—especially with so many talented designers all around me, right here in Singapore.

Some who make my acquaintance may call me a Tiger Mom. I can't really deny that either. After all, my children's education was the reason I moved to Singapore in the first place. I take my daughters' schooling and extracurricular activities very, very seriously.

Others I meet may simply regard me as “Jim Rogers' wife”. And, of course, they'd be right about that as well. Although there are many times when it pains me to be overshadowed by his notoriety, or made invisible by his imposing personality, I'm proud to be married to a man whose hard work and brilliant mind gave him the opportunity to retire from a career as a Wall Street hedge-fund heavy at 37 to pursue his passions, a man

whose energy and curiosity outshine that of men half his age.

So yes, I am all of those things. But I am also Paige Parker. Not the Paige Parker I was before 29 December 1998, when I embarked on an adventure that changed me forever—a three-year journey to the ends of the earth and back with my maybe-soon-to-be husband.

The “before” Paige Parker was a small-town girl from the all-American city of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Smack dab between New York and Florida, Rocky Mount—population 50,000—was known as a pit stop for those driving up or down the East Coast. It was a place where dining on ethnic food meant eating pizza. Where going to the theatre meant seeing a double feature matinee. It was a place built on cotton mills and tobacco and apple brandy, brought to life in the mid-1800s by the railroad that arrived to connect Rocky Mount to the outside worlds both north and south, where the Raleigh–Tarboro stagecoach stopped to carry debarking travellers wanting to continue east or west. Rocky Mount was a place for people looking to go elsewhere. No wonder I did what I did. It was in my DNA.

I was happy in Rocky Mount, a well-adjusted kid who fit in with the rest. I was a dancer, cheerleader, oratorical contest winner, Junior Miss. But I was always a dreamer. Back then, my dreams were just that—dreams. It was from Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume that I learned about the virtues of spunk and self-reliance. Nancy Drew became my role model as a strong, adventuresome woman, one who always remained cool under fire. Disney World’s Epcot Center opened my 13-year-old eyes to faraway lands and the wonders of other cultures.

In reality, I remained untouched by the outside world. Those who knew me during those years would never have imagined me, in real life, actually battling sand storms and blistering heat, outrunning armed insurgents and civil wars, confronting corrupt officials, fighting off gropers and grifters, and learning to skilfully deal with malaria, filth and enough red tape to wrap an elephant.

I’ve no doubt there are plenty of acquaintances since who cannot imagine this either. Because my journey didn’t affect me in any way that would be obvious to outsiders. I didn’t come home with blue skin or a new accent, or rings through my cheeks. But I had changed. And what I see now is just how much the experiences during my incredible trip around the world have informed the way I live my life, every minute of every day.

I started to write about my adventure the minute I set foot on US soil again. Then life got in the way—two daughters, a handful of a husband and a move halfway across the globe. I kept at it whenever I had the chance, hoping to leave a chronicle for my children, wanting them to know all I had seen and done in my life before they came along. Jim, being Jim, wrote and published his own book within just over a year of our return. But when I read *Adventure Capitalist*, I knew it wasn’t my story. Were we even in the same car together? It amazed me just how different two people’s takes on a shared experience could be.

Now, after turning fifty, I realise that it’s not just for my daughters that this story needs to be told. It’s for all the women who are finding their own way in this big, wide world. Those who will thrive by saying yes, by keeping their eyes and their hearts open to all that life has to offer. Those who are tempted to push boundaries, to dare to do the unexpected.

It’s also for all those women I met, from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, who taught me about ambition and strength and resourcefulness, and the courage it takes to navigate a world driven by men. The women I saw who would do anything for the sake, or even the survival, of their children. The women who showed me what it means not to be a quitter. Theirs are the timeless stories that need to be told.

The world has changed since the years I spent on the road, and will continue to change. But what remains constant is our desire to pave the way for better lives for our own daughters. To make sure they have choices, and to make sure they recognise those choices even when they aren’t obvious. To encourage them to embrace life and stare down whatever obstacles dare to get in their way. And to set an example by living our own lives that way.

So this story is also for me, the “me” I am today, as my shoutout to anyone who’s thinking of stepping outside the lines to wander away from their comfort zone. It *is* a big, wide world. Get out there and grab it by the wheels.



1

Rocky Mount to NYC

“YOU’RE WHAT?” MY childhood friend Pamela pulled up the straps of her one-piece and sat up straight in the plastic lounge chair, her hand shading her eyes as she looked up into my face. Around us, the squeals of children freshly liberated from stifling classroom walls pierced the thick North Carolina air. I let my eyes wander around the familiar grounds of the local swim club before I responded. How many hours had I spent here as a kid, daydreaming with my eyes shut against the summer sun, imagining myself as a famous ballerina flitting across a stage, a tough lawyer ruling the world, a beautiful princess in the arms of my handsome prince with all eyes upon me?

“I said I’m driving around the world. Leaving end of the year. That’s why I’m here—to say goodbye to my folks.” I nodded towards my parents who were standing at the concession stand waiting for lemonade.

“Wait. What? Driving around the world? Like in a car? Have you lost your marbles, girl? Must be all that New York craziness getting to you. Time to come back home.”

“Nope, that’s what I said. Driving around the world. In a car.” I pulled up a chair and sat.

Pamela laughed dismissively as she wrapped a towel around her toddler’s damp, shivering body. “How can you even do that? You and I both learned in third grade that 70 per cent of the earth is water. Or were you absent that day?”

I must confess that I wasn’t too serious of a student, preferring dance classes and cheerleading, until probably my last two years in college, but I was well aware of the oceans’ expanse. And though I’d never admit it to Pamela, when the idea of the trip was initially proposed to me, my first reaction was identical to hers. Instead I told her, “That’s what cargo ships are for.”

Pamela simply nodded, a faraway look in her eyes.

“We’re going for the Guinness Book of Records,” I added. “For ‘the most countries visited in a continuous journey by car.’”

“Why? And *we*? Who is *we*?”

Now it was my turn to laugh. How could I ever explain to Pamela how I got swept up in Jim’s boundless ambition, his over-the-top craving to attempt the impossible and succeed at any cost? Would she ever understand how it fed into my own lifelong restlessness, the ache that had developed during all those long afternoons by this very pool and that I carried with me to this day? The escape to New York had been a Band-Aid, but its power to heal my yearning for adventure was wearing thin. There was no way to explain it, so I simply responded, “Why? Because. And who? It’s Jim. I’m going with Jim.”

“Jim,” Pamela repeated, silently flipping through the names of my old boyfriends she must have had filed away in her brain. “Jim?”

“Yes, Jim. The man I met while I was working as a fundraiser in Charlotte. He was speaking. The investor.”

“You mean *Jim* Jim? The one you were seeing when you first moved up north? You’re still dating him? The old guy?”

“He’s not old! Well, maybe he is a little old, but he acts younger than anyone we know.”

“What, he leaves his dirty clothes on the floor and drinks his milk straight from the carton?” Pamela wiped her son’s nose with a corner of the towel.

“No,” I laughed. “I mean his attitude. I’ve never met anyone like him.

He’s got more enthusiasm and curiosity than people half his age.”

“You mean like you?” Pamela teased.

“Very funny. And his energy! Do you know he rides a bike to get everywhere he goes, all over the city? And he insists on working out every day, no matter what.” In fact, I had some serious doubts about my ability to keep up with Jim, day after day on the road. Sometimes he could be exhausting.

“Okay,” Pamela continued, “so let me get this straight. You’re driving around the world, in a car, with some old guy you’re not even married to, just to get your name on a page in some book?”

“It’s more than that, Pam. And Jim isn’t just ‘some old guy’. I’m a little head over heels for him, if you want to know the truth.”



The truth was that, for both of us, it had been love at first sight. A *coup de foudre*, as the French say. A lightning bolt. I felt the hairs on my arms stand on end when we were first introduced at the fundraiser, just after I’d seen Jim give a wildly entertaining presentation about his 161,000-kilometre motorcycle journey through six continents. “I’ve always wanted to drive cross-country,” I mumbled idiotically as he shook my damp palm.

“So what’s stopping you?” he replied in a soft Southern accent that melted my heart.

“Cash flow,” I snapped back.

Jim had laughed.

Less than 24 hours later, I had three voicemails from him and I thought I was hallucinating. *Meeting you was magic*, he had said. I hit replay and listened again. And again. Even though I was cautious enough, and wise enough after 26 years on earth, to wonder how many other women he’d used that line on, the relentlessly naïve part of me still hoped that my dreams of Prince Charming might actually be coming true.

Our first real date in New York did nothing to dispel my fantasies. The stars of the Paris Opera Ballet leapt and whirled around the stage in a frenzy at Lincoln Center, carrying me back to my own ballerina dreams. I found myself *chassé-ing* and *jeté-ing* halfway up our forty-block trek to a

six-storey Beaux-Arts townhouse overlooking the Hudson River.

“Welcome to my home,” Jim said as he held open the ornately gated doors. With my chin nearly touching the floor, I stood silent in the foyer under the rainbow glow from a Tiffany skylight. From behind an ancient silk screen, Jim rolled out a bicycle built for two. “Hop on,” he insisted. “We’re going to dinner.” I tugged self-consciously at my short red knit dress. “What’s the problem?” he chided. “Never ridden a bike before?”

The leaves rustled in the evening breeze as we crossed Central Park. Rowboats skimmed across the glassy surface of an emerald green lake as we coasted past flocks of joggers out for their evening run. Dogs sniffed at the trunks of the fat chestnut trees lining the path, and in the distance, the New York skyline was beginning to twinkle against a cobalt sky.

I was barely aware of the food we ate or the wine we drank at dinner that night. We seemed to have so much to talk about. All I remember is the warmth in Jim’s crinkly blue eyes, and his graciousness as he gently blotted up the puddle from my overturned glass without missing a beat in the conversation. “You know,” he whispered as he dabbed at the red stain spreading across the crisp white tablecloth, “there’s something I want to tell you that I haven’t told a soul.”

I pulled my chair closer, eager to hear whatever intimate confidence he seemed willing to share, and held my breath as he reached for my hand.

“I’m thinking of going around the world again. You wanna come along?”

The air came rushing out of me like a sudden gust off the Outer Banks. “I’m in,” I said with a laugh, feeling as though I could follow this man anywhere, yet never truly believing that such a crazy idea would ever see the light of day, or that any relationship with a man like this—who had been married twice before, by the way—would last longer than a popsicle on a hot sidewalk.

Yet we continued to see each other, almost every weekend. And when Jim suggested flying down from New York to North Carolina to meet my parents, I thought I was going to die. No, it wasn’t from the thrill of such a seemingly serious step on his part, it was just that I hadn’t told my parents everything there was to know about Jim.

Hungry for new people and places, he was every bit the gypsy. He’d worked like a maniac on Wall Street, co-founding one of the first hedge funds, until the age of 37, when he retired “with more money than I thought I’d have in a lifetime, but it wasn’t very much”, he now admits.

He’d wanted to retire young to do other things, like become a professor at Columbia Business School, and a business and political commentator on TV shows, travel extensively, write for several publications and publish more than a handful of books.

What would my parents, two hardworking people, think about a guy who had retired so young? Worse, they had no idea how old Jim actually was. He was 54. Me, 26. Here I was, their only child, betting my future on a man almost as old as they were. And I just prayed that Jim wouldn’t bring up the trip.



Sitting by the pool that day with Pamela, I had to smile as I watched my parents cross the lawn with their drinks, remembering how Jim, at that first dinner at Rocky Mount’s finest steakhouse—where I had waitressed some summers before—pulled out all the stops and let his Southern charm wash over Mom and Dad like honey from a spigot.

“So how long are you two going to be gone?” Pamela asked, her brows furrowing into one straight line.

I took a deep breath before answering. “He estimates three years.”

“What the hell, Paige! Three years with a guy you hardly know? What are you thinking?”

“I know him well enough,” I protested. “We see each other every day now that I live up in New York.”

Jim and I had courted long distance for 16 months. I accrued more miles heading to New York than he did going south, but I never minded since the big city and Jim continued to be magical, opening my eyes beyond the small world of mine. Yet the realist in me knew that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and living in the same place and seeing each other regularly would be a genuine test of our relationship. So, with a heavy heart, I left my job heading major gifts at Queens University in Charlotte, North Carolina, to work in the for-profit sector in NYC. I would *not* move in with Jim, and needed to pay the hefty rent for my one-bedroom apartment in a sexy IM Pei building, only a few blocks from the marketing agency where I headed business development. The first day

on the job, my boss quit. Although I was a nervous wreck, I eventually took on his position, and held my own. It was, to say the least, an exciting time. The crazy, manic city nourished me, as it had countless others, but insecurities festered.

Although I was as confident as a fireman in my small hometown of 50,000 people, the Big Apple, where even six-year-olds sipped lattes and every bright man and woman had at least one Ivy League degree, made me feel like an absolute simpleton. When I was a teenager, I used to say “She fell off the turnip truck” about anyone I deemed a hick or know-nothing.

“I feel like a turnip,” I admitted to Jim one evening as we snuggled on the sofa in front of the glowing fireplace.

“I was the exact same,” he laughed, before consoling me. “This can be a tough town. When I first arrived at Yale and visited a classmate’s home on Park Avenue, I nearly choked on a martini. I’d never had gin before!”

With a bit of time, I began to understand that there were more people in New York like me than not. Still, how to explain all of this to Pamela?

“Yes, but have you lived *with* him?” she asked. “Trust me, living with them is a whole different ballgame. It’s like all of a sudden, once you share a roof, you start seeing all these things in the other person that you could have sworn weren’t there before. It’s as though being married unlocks some secret door or something. It’s not easy. And you guys aren’t even married!”

“Yes, but we are engaged.” I flashed the engagement ring Jim had surprised me with right after he crossed the finish line of the New York City Marathon. *I was high on endorphins. Didn’t know what I was doing*, he liked to tell anyone who would listen. I had to wonder if the proposal was simply Jim’s way of cementing my agreement (and my parents’ approval) to go with him on the trip.

Not-so-deep down I knew Pamela had a point. I had never lived with a man before. And we weren’t going to just be living together, we’d be sharing the front seat of a little sports car, all 1.7 metres of it, for the better part of a thousand or so days. Better men—and women—have buckled under less duress than that.

There was something else I was keeping totally to myself. I wasn’t a hundred per cent sure I even wanted to marry Jim. When one night, out of the blue over after-dinner drinks, Jim declared that we’d wait until we’d been on the road for a year before tying the knot, I was pissed upon realising he wanted to use the road trip as a test of our relationship. “Lots

of couples do just fine under one roof, but you put them in a car from New York to California and one of them will inevitably want to kill the other by Missouri,” he laughed. I opened my mouth to protest, but quickly closed it. I had figured Jim wasn’t too eager to get married again, with those two divorces in his past. And he’d been single now for over twenty years. But I knew he was right about this. I also knew that although another divorce might not be a huge deal for him, I was determined never to go down that road. Me, I was planning to marry once, and forever. Unless, or until, he was sure, this was not going to happen. And what better way to be sure than to put a relationship through this, the ultimate test?

I peppered him relentlessly with questions about the trip, and what I should expect. Unlike Jim, my travel experience had been somewhat limited, with only a few college weeks spent in London and a short backpacking trip through Austria and Germany under my belt. “So where’s the itinerary?” was my first and most obvious request. “What’s the plan? I want to share it with my parents.”

“Plan?” he replied. “Here’s the plan. We’re gonna do our best to avoid wars, plagues and impassable roads whenever possible. And we will also avoid Siberia in the winter.” His repeated warnings about other likely scenarios—lack of food, monsoons, questionable or nonexistent lodgings, corrupt officials, endless border delays, bandits—made me wonder if he was perhaps trying to talk me out of going. It was hard for me to actually picture any of that happening. Instead, my imagination wandered to visions of Shinto shrines, ancient mosques, cliff-side monasteries, the mysteries of King Tut’s tomb, the treasures of the Sistine Chapel, the snowy peaks of Mount Fuji, the shifting sands of the Sahara.

“But where we will start?” I asked seriously, knowing my daydreaming would lead us nowhere.

“Iceland, I think.”

“Why Iceland?”

“We have to start somewhere,” Jim replied smugly before describing the North American and European tectonic plates meeting there, allowing us on Day One to drive from one continent to another.

When I wasn’t working, I pored over maps of Europe and Scandinavia, dreaming of a stop at every tourist spot. But it wasn’t until we picked up the canary yellow coupe and matching trailer in California on my thirtieth birthday, 10 November 1998, that our epic trip became real.

Upon seeing the car, my home for the next three years, I almost cried. “It’s so small!” I grumbled. “We’ll kill each other!”

Jim laughed.

I was serious.

Sure, I knew it wouldn’t be easy—that much closeness for all that time—but I wanted to see the world. I wanted to be with Jim. I was in love. And he was going to leave with or without me.

So that is how I found myself in Reykjavik after New Year’s, stumbling out of a half-buried Mercedes into a two-metre snowdrift on the side of an isolated road in the middle of the worst storm in the history of Iceland, and shouting at my fiancé over a biting wind as a tear slid halfway down my cheek, and then froze.



2

Iceland to Turkey

IT’S A FUNNY thing how one little word can change the course of a life. Had I not said yes to that first date at the ballet, I very well could have remained firmly entrenched in North Carolina, still dreaming of the beautiful wide world from behind the safety of my white picket fence. Never would I have felt the pebbly Tahitian sand between my toes, savoured the sweetness of a ripe, juicy pomegranate from the banks of the Nile, heard the chanting of the Hindus as they bathed away their sins in the filthy water of the Ganges. And never would I have had the courage or imagination to choose Singapore, an island 15,000 kilometres away from Rocky Mount, as the place to raise my family. But more on that later.

Of course, back when I first met Jim, it was easy to say yes. And why not? I was single, I was relatively carefree and I had a penchant for adventure, or at least a penchant for the thought of it. And I was sure I was in love. Even though I wasn’t totally convinced at the time that I should actually *marry* him, Jim had swept me off my feet. There were evenings at the opera and the symphony, long nights dancing to big band music in Harlem. And then

I got consumed in the planning and packing for the trip.

Sleeping bags? Check. Maps? Check. Swiss Army knives? Check. Hypodermic needles? “Wait, what?” I asked Jim when he added them to the list.

“Just in case,” he answered. *In case of what*, I had to wonder, but kept it to myself. We were to also carry two litres of vodka, to use as an emergency disinfectant and analgesic, although there were plenty of times I could have used it for more conventional reasons. As it happened, the vodka ended up being ceremoniously dumped into dry brown earth by an officious Saudi customs agent who seemed to relish making an example of us.

Then there was the car. She was, shall I say, unique: a custom-made combination of a rugged Gelaendewagen chassis and diesel engine—designed for the German army—and a sleek SLK body with retractable hard-top convertible. A six-cylinder, five-speed automatic with four-wheel drive and a black leather interior and a 1.8-metre long trailer for all our essentials, including water, diesel fuel, medical supplies, camping equipment, spare parts and two small black Travelpro suitcases. Jim and I would essentially be living in a dune buggy on steroids. But I had to admit, she was kind of cool.



That sweet yellow Mercedes was now sitting like a crippled canary half submerged in a snow bank. I had seen it coming. Or rather, had sensed it coming. Straining to make out the road ahead through the blinding snow, I hadn't even been able to see the front end of the hood. And then came the ditch.

“What were you thinking?” I shouted at Jim. “Iceland in the dead of winter? You're insane!” He didn't react, which pissed me off even more. “Why do you always think you know best?” I seethed, by now unable to control myself.

But Jim was already out of the car. I climbed out into the waist-deep snow and joined him in a futile effort to dig out the wheels as the storm picked up. My sneakers and thin socks were soaked, and the all-weather coat—intended to take me through every country, rain, shine, hot or

cold—did little. My body turned numb from the biting wind as the late afternoon darkness began to fall. It wasn't until an hour later that a tow truck appeared out of nowhere to save us.

Back in Egilsstadir, where we had begun our journey 12 hours earlier, we sat huddled by the fire, wrapped in blankets. I couldn't even look at Jim. Now I was asking myself what *I* had been thinking. Had I been a fool to buy into his overblown assuredness? Sure, we were travelling in a car specifically built to endure rough roads and foul weather, but regardless, who in his right mind would take off in a blizzard into an unfamiliar, remote tip of the world? Especially when he had no experience driving an all-terrain vehicle? I began to seriously question Jim's sense of judgement. But, I worried, as I turned to see my fiancé effortlessly measure out two glasses of red wine as if we were simply relaxing after a day at the office, perhaps it was my own sense of judgement that was to blame. Those deep blue eyes and those dimpled cheeks had lured me into a situation way beyond my capabilities. And possibly even beyond his capabilities. Suddenly Jim reached out his arm, thick from the woollen sweater enveloping it, and pulled me into a bear hug. “To being alive!” he laughed as he held up a glass. “This is what it's all about, right Paige?” I struggled free of his grip, my head spinning with bewilderment. This guy was crazy. I needed to find a way home.

Yet somehow I found myself, two days later, by Jim's side as we drove out of Egilsstadir at a snail's pace, chaperoned by the very same emergency squad which had rescued us earlier, along for the ride to ensure our successful departure. This time it was their truck that slid into a snowy ditch, and we were the ones helping to bail them out. I didn't dare give Jim the satisfaction of acknowledging his *See, it could have happened to anyone* look.

After the glorious drive circling the rest of Iceland, it was off to Ireland. And no, we did not swim. The car was loaded onto a container ship, and we boarded one of the handful of flights we'd be taking on this journey. Heading to Dublin, I allowed my confidence more room. Dublin! The city of cozy pubs and cobbled streets! The land of James Joyce and George Bernard Shaw! I couldn't wait. This I could do. After dismissing Jim's plan of hiring taxis in every major city (to guide us effortlessly to our hotels since we were travelling pre-GPS, Google Maps and Uber!), I had no sooner opened the map than we found ourselves driving down dead-

end roads, one-way streets and narrow passages that all led us to the city centre, where not much had changed since the second century. I was anxious. Jim was gloating. “Getting us lost in Dublin” soon became his response to every question I raised about his judgement.



Before I knew it, a month had passed. We were off to a rocky start, but with each orange sunset, I kept saying yes to whatever challenges and delights the next day might bring. And with whatever that allowed me to take those crazy leaps of faith, I headed east with Jim towards Japan, an endeavor that would likely take us five months to accomplish. Through Belgium into Germany then Austria—a blur of churches and spaetzle and smooth wine and quiet cafés. I was in no hurry to leave Western Europe, but of course Jim had “been there, done that”, so I tried to soak in as much as I could as he whisked me from city to city.

In Budapest, one of the few places I had actually visited before, Jim and I explored Pest’s industrial zone, where unused warehouses with spectacular views dotted the banks of the Danube and awaited buyers to transform the vacant spaces into lofts. But in other areas, massive, soulless concrete offices and apartments blotted the skyline.

“They should tear those monstrosities down,” I told Jim.

“Housing needs are growing,” he argued. “No one is going to tear something down just because it’s ugly.”

Later, in a coffeehouse, I met a local barber who agreed with me.

“How do you find Budapest?” he asked.

“Oh, you live in one of the most beautiful cities in the world,” I replied, truthfully.

“We think so too,” he said, before taking a loud slurp of espresso.

“Though I do hate to see the old buildings falling apart, while those awful Soviet slabs get upkeep.”

Putting down his tiny cup, he nodded. “It’s the Germans and American investors who are buying those magnificent structures. Only they’re tearing them down and replacing them with the modern. It’s cheaper than to restore. It is a travesty that we allow this. Budapest isn’t a modern city.

We are old, and precious.”

Jim snorted. “Survival of the fittest,” I heard him mutter under his breath.

“What, you don’t think all this gorgeous architecture should be preserved? It’s okay to just erase the past in the name of the almighty dollar?”

“Come on, Paige. It’s all subjective. Who gets to decide what’s gorgeous? And everything is history. Even those concrete slabs became history the day after they went up. Who gets to decide what is worth keeping?”

This was not the first, nor the last time our worldviews collided. I loved Jim for the certainty of his convictions, for his ability to see things in his own unique way no matter what anyone else thought. But honestly? Sometimes it drove me nuts. Yet deeper and deeper into uncharted territory I followed.



Our route to Turkey, through an Eastern Europe grappling with the fall of communism, had been determined by visits to embassies and conversations with locals in Hungary, from whom we sought advice about the roads, the banditry, and the trouble in Romania and Yugoslavia. I was somewhat comforted by the fact that Jim appeared to be so methodical and sensible with his research, but as we wound through the Dinaric Alps towards Belgrade, past rushing streams and scattered homes of thatch and stone, I could almost smell the danger in the air, as if we were just one step ahead of the clashing armies.

In fact, we were. Planning to end our day in Belgrade, we arrived with some daylight remaining, so continued on to the city of Niš, more than a hundred kilometres from the hot spot of Kosovo. It was clear that we were the only guests in the roadside motel. After a dinner of grey meat, stale bread and local schnapps—there was no water clean enough to drink—we hunkered down in bed in a heatless room. At 2am, I heard shots outside our window.

“They’re just moving furniture downstairs,” mumbled Jim. “Go back to sleep.”

As if. I sighed loudly and shot him a look, both gestures futile against his tightly closed eyes and raspy snores. A few days later, after we had

left Niš, we received news that the city had been bombed by NATO troops. Today, Yugoslavia has permanently broken up, but the problems continue among ethnic groups and politicians.

As the Turkish border approached, I slipped a cheap gold band we had picked up along the way onto the fourth finger of my left hand. For the sake of propriety in a culture more traditional than our own, we would pretend to be married. Groggy with lack of sleep, I fumbled for change when we came across toll takers unwilling to accept the local currency, instead looking for the Deutsche marks, American dollars, Austrian schillings that symbolised a more sound economy. The people had lost faith in their own government.

As I nervously twisted the ersatz wedding ring and looked over at Jim, blissfully humming to himself behind the wheel, I thought: had I lost faith in my own future? I was still holding tight to my fairy tales, yet I wasn't sure if I was in the right story. Theoretically we were sticking to the plan—travel for a year, and then a wedding. I wanted to still believe that it would all happen, but had my doubts. When push came to shove, would Jim really be able to go through with it? And, I thought as all the petty quarrels and conflicts we'd had since leaving the States replayed through my mind in an endless loop, was Jim really my Prince Charming?



The bustling metropolis of Istanbul proved no less chaotic or menacing than what we had been through. Among the veering and swerving maniacs on the crowded four-lane roads were soldiers in tanks patrolling the city centre. With the help of the United States, Turkish authorities had captured the leader of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party, Abdullah Öcalan, on the day we arrived. Hundreds of machine-gun-toting soldiers surrounded Atatürk's statue, a popular gathering spot near our hotel. A few weeks ago in Germany, Jim had replaced our Alabama plates with a nondescript licence tag. At the time I had thought him overly cautious. Now, as Turks staged anti-American riots, I was relieved to be somewhat anonymous while driving through the angry crowds.

The next day, a visit to the Blue Mosque offered a rare opportunity to

relax. Leaving my shoes outside among the piles of others, I entered the cavernous structure and stood stock-still, awed by the beauty of the domed mosaic ceiling and stunned by the midday sun streaming through the hundreds of stained-glass windows, like a signal from the heavens above. But what was that signal saying? I searched around the bare interior for a place to sit. No pews, no benches. Only the carpet where worshippers knelt, praying towards Mecca. I was tired. And confused. What was I doing so far from home, pretending to be someone I was not, with my fake ring and my fake licence plate and, if I had to be honest, my fake bravado. And with a man who was proving to be so damn sure of everything and so determined to have things his way. I feared that with time I'd lose whatever voice I'd gained after 18 months of working in the big city.

And I was angry, I thought, as I felt tension spreading in my jaw. Angry at the sight of the women relegated to worshipping at the rear of the mosque. Angry at the clueless tourists entering with their heads uncovered and their shoulders bare. Angry at my make-believe husband who had swept me off my feet only to dump me into a heap of uncertainty.

Later that evening, in a smoky restaurant on the edge of the Bosphorus, we sipped white wine and feasted on bass and brim fresh from the sea. I remained quiet as we finished our meal, still deep in my thoughts, debating if, and how long, I should stick with this ridiculous journey. Suddenly Jim grabbed the coffee cup from my hand. He covered it with the saucer from the table, swirled it around and flipped the whole thing upside down and back again. "Local custom," he muttered, as the waiter rushed towards us. The white-jacketed man solemnly uncovered the cup, the thick, muddy sediment running down its sides. He peered inside and turned his gaze to Jim, then me, then back to Jim. "You will travel far," he predicted with a wink in my direction.

I continued on with Jim to central Turkey's Cappadocia region, where we stopped to see the remains of Derinkuyu, an eight-storey underground city said to be founded by the Hittites four thousand years before. We crouched to follow our guide through the honeycomb passages carved from soft volcanic rock. I kept my distance from the others, straining to imagine life as it was for the thousands of families who had confined themselves in these subterranean dwellings, fleeing through one of the hundreds of doors hidden in the courtyards above to escape the battles crossing the land. Yet these people hadn't simply been cowering below,

waiting for the fighting to stop. On the contrary! They had built stables, schools, wine cellars, bedrooms, a church. A ventilation system had been created to provide air, a well for fresh water. I sat for a moment on one of the smooth, stone steps leading down to the next level, overwhelmed by the strength of these people—people who had been faced with the ultimate challenge and who had chosen to survive on their own terms. Who managed to adapt without abandoning their culture, their values, who they were, even for one day. I took note.

The next day—top down, Grateful Dead blasting, my feet through the window, toes wiggling in the hot breeze—we headed to Georgia, driving along the banks of a turquoise lake as snow-capped peaks stretched into the clouds beyond. Jim, driving, looked as relaxed as Buddha. I smiled and squeezed his hand, the warmth of his touch flowing through my limbs. Days like these made me think that just maybe I'd made the right decision after all, when Jim's cockiness and pig-headedness looked more like the tenacity and boldness that had made me fall for him in the first place. Sure it was tough, the daily challenges of being on the road and all this togetherness, where cracks in the armour sometimes seemed to ooze disappointment. And I was sure it worked both ways. *I warned you, Paige*, he'd sigh with exasperation each time I'd express distaste over a filthy accommodation or a rude official. But I can do this, I thought as the shadows from the noonday sun washed over us like gentle ocean waves. I can deal. I can adapt.

The scenery before us had become breathtakingly beautiful. "Oh my," I said out loud, repeating the words again and again with each splendid turn of the wheel.

Jim laughed. "It is a spectacular drive, right Baby Lamb? One of the world's best, in my book. I can't wait to bring our children here."



3

Georgia to Azerbaijan

JIM NEVER WANTED to have children, having been the eldest of five boys. "I feel sorry for people who have children," he told me early on in our relationship. "They're a total waste of time, energy and money." At the time I had laughed, unable to fathom that anyone would really feel that way. I assumed it was one of his contrarian comments, those things he loved to say to get a reaction out of people. Later, in one of his more reflective moments, Jim pointed to his own childhood as the reason for his attitude. Raised in small-town Alabama by a hardworking chemical plant engineer and a frazzled young mother who gave birth to four boys in six years, he had been called upon often to pitch in around the house. His parents' struggles were something he had no interest in inheriting.

When I first brought up parenthood as a serious option, Jim hesitated. "It's a little early to settle down, don't you think?" Jim was sixty years old.

I remember the day our first child was born—a beautiful spring day in New York City. I was prepared to go it alone—with a doula and my mother by my side at the hospital—as Jim's busy schedule was so hard to

predict. I even had a little pouch of North Carolina dirt under the bed so that my baby would be born over Southern soil. But Jim was there, holding my hand throughout the entire delivery. When the nurse placed the swaddled bundle into his arms, I saw the awe in his eyes that was a million times greater than that inspired by the peaks of Kilimanjaro, the mysteries of Easter Island or the temples of Mandalay. Not even the spectacular Victoria Falls, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, came remotely close. “So what should we call her?” he asked.

“Perfection,” I answered. And for the first time in our life together, I watched a tear roll down my husband’s cheek.



That afternoon as we headed towards Georgia, our daughter was just a twinkle in her father’s eye (or probably, a twinkle in my eye). The striking Turkish countryside melted into a blur in the rear-view mirror as we drove. We reached the Black Sea at sunset, the peaks of churning water lit by the day’s last golden rays. Suddenly the road before us disappeared, as if it had been erased.

“It’s the sea,” Jim explained. “Mother Nature at her bitchiest.” The destruction turned a sixty-kilometre jaunt into a two-hour nail-biting journey.

Upon exiting Turkish territory, we found ourselves at the Georgian border as darkness loomed. Dozens of guards, rifles and machine guns slung across their backs, surrounded us. As I jumped from the car to ask the youngest and most-harmless-looking one for directions, catcalls and whistles pierced the air. I slid back in and drove to the first checkpoint, where Jim left me to find parking as he searched for the passport station.

I waited and watched as the guards used their loud voices, and the tips of their guns, to show off their authority to those gathered on the Turkish side of the metal fence and others waiting in line for permission to cross.

With our passports stamped, Jim drove as directed into a warehouse, where creeping mechanical doors lowered around us, boxing us in like prisoners behind bars. Six men with machine guns surrounded the car. Opening the trailer, I pointed to a map we had mounted to the inside,

each day marked in red pen to show our progression around the world. Since we’d only just begun, the red line was just a few centimetres long. The Georgian officials were not impressed. I could feel my heart begin to thump, scenes from all the bad action movies I’d ever seen racing through my brain. These guys could do anything, accuse us of anything, get away with anything, and nobody would know, nobody would care. Desperate to prove we were clean with nothing to hide, I flung open our bags to display their contents.

“Heroin? Guns?” a burly soldier growled. I almost laughed, until it dawned on me that perhaps this might be the set-up I’d feared. Then I heard the word *tourist* come from one of their mouths.

“Yes, yes. Tourists,” I practically wept, praying that the word meant freedom. “Tourists travelling to Batumi.”

“Okay,” the meanest-looking soldier said with a smirk. I smiled and offered him a banana Power Bar. He shoved my hand away.

Then, we were out of the holding cell and through yet another checkpoint, where our passport information was taken for a third time. Jim, loaded with documents, headed inside the customs office.

“Stay with the car,” he said before slamming the door.

The next 45 minutes were the longest of my life, at least at the time. Surrounded by thirty curious, bored and horny men, I remained prisoner in the Mercedes as they pressed their lips to the windows, grabbed their crotches and stuck out their tongues. I tried my best to remain expressionless, my eyes staring straight ahead. But it was no use. The men simply laughed at my discomfort. How I wanted to leap out and join Jim in the customs office, but I was way too scared to unlock the door.

Instead I pulled out a large map and held it in front of my face, pretending to read. In response, the men kicked at the tyres, beat on the hood, and hit at the metal car frame and fiberglass trailer with their fists. I feared one would knock out the window. Watching me squirm was apparently great entertainment.

In hindsight, I should have put on my earphones and simply ignored them. The me of today would have. But back then, I was new to these types of encounters.

When Jim returned to the car, I totally lost it. “My God, Paige,” he sighed as the tears ran down my face, “they’re just men looking at a woman. Give me a goddamn break.”

“A break?” I barked back, my anger spewing like sparks from a waking volcano. “You want *me* to give *you* a break? I’m sorry if I’m not the superwoman you expected to have along for the ride, but I am not made of stone.” My voice had risen to full volume. “I am human, and human beings, in case you didn’t know, have feelings. At least most of us do.” I slammed my fist down on the dashboard.

Jim smiled. “Now that’s more like it.”

Though spitting venom may have been Jim’s preferred way of dealing with threatening situations, it was simply not my style. Clearly there would be no sympathy from him. Not now, not for the next 2.9 years we’d be on the road. And without a comforting shoulder to lean on, without family or friends within thousands of kilometres, I knew I would have to rely solely on my own determination to see me through this journey.

That night, sitting in that car surrounded by all those men who were now, in Jim’s presence, so remarkably subdued, I realised how badly I wanted to succeed.

I no longer wanted to be along just for the ride. I wanted this journey to be mine.

Our hotel for the night was surrounded by the crumbling buildings and broken streets of Batumi, the second-largest city in Georgia. As we removed our bags from the trailer, we could see the electricity flickering inside, then failing, then resuming, then repeating the process several times before dying for the night at the exact moment Jim paid cash upfront for our room. With my flashlight in one hand and my bag in the other, I dragged myself up three flights of battered wooden stairs.

It was now close to midnight, and in the cavernous, rotten-smelling room, it was cold enough to see my breath. In the bathroom, not a stitch of toilet paper, no toilet seat. And, as I found when I balanced the flashlight on a wobbly shelf above the sink and twisted the rusty spigot, no water. I had not had a proper shower in days.

Feeling my way towards one of the two single beds, I climbed in, wrapped in the travel sheet I carried for the sake of hygiene and my own sanity. *Your journey*, I reminded myself as I squeezed my eyes shut. *Your decision*. Music pounded up through the floor from the disco below. “Isn’t it interesting how the electricity works down there but not up here?” I remarked to an already snoring Jim.

An hour later, he was leaping out of bed to the sound of someone

pounding on the door. A heavysset *babushka* stood in the dark hallway. A “floor mother”, a remnant of Soviet hotels who supervised and cared for guests’ needs, like bringing towels, soap or tea. Tonight she was offering a scantily clad bleached-blond teenager. The next morning I watched through the window as a shiny black Mercedes—one of several we’d curiously noted in town—cruised slowly by and stopped. A man in an eggplant-coloured suit emerged from behind the car’s tinted, curtained windows and approached the *babushka*. She handed him a wad of money and off he went.

In the capital of Tbilisi, we sat for tea with Zaza, a professor who expressed optimism for his country despite the fact that the government had not paid employees or pensioners in seven months. Zaza himself earned the equivalent of only US\$15 per month, much of that going to books for his students. “I am obliged to better my nation,” he claimed. “By teaching I may produce students who will become leaders with strong character, improving Georgia one day.”

“That is quite noble,” I replied.

“It may be noble, but I am not. I am just like any other man. I grow excited when my elevator works, which happens only when someone dies in my building. That is the only time the electricity is switched on, allowing the body passage down. Of course, I do not wish death on any man, but I live on the eighth floor. I like it when the elevator works.”



Next was Azerbaijan. After a couple of days in the bustling city of Baku, we dined with Namik, a business acquaintance of Jim’s. The moment we stepped into his black Mercedes I knew that the striking young woman in the front seat was not the wife who reared his three children.

“This is my friend, Natalia. She is Russian,” Namik said proudly.

“My wife had family obligations,” he muttered under his breath as we pulled up to the restaurant. I nodded, raising an eyebrow at Jim.

As the wine flowed freely, I learned that 29-year-old Natalia, as graceful as a Kirov ballerina and college educated, had no job, lived in a large apartment “sponsored by Namik” and travelled with him to Paris, Rome,

London. “Soon, we’re off to the Canary Islands,” he told me. He must have sensed that I was not impressed, since he quickly explained, “You see, my wife doesn’t like to travel.”

If someone had told me, way back when in Rocky Mount, that someday I’d be sitting at a table, totally at ease, breaking bread with a man and a woman he openly acknowledged as his mistress, I’d have called her nuts. But the thing was, as much as I wanted to feel scorn for this woman, I couldn’t. She was genuinely as sweet as Southern iced tea and as smart as a whip. But once Namik dropped us off, I reached for Jim’s arm as we entered the hotel, and the words poured out. “I can’t believe he had the nerve to bring his mistress. Seriously?”

Jim chuckled. “In this culture, men often pay a compliment by taking their youngest, most attractive wife or mistress. That’s all Namik did. He brought the woman he thought most beautiful and probably the most Western. It just depends on how you look at it, Paige.”

It was also in Baku that I met Svetlana, a dark-haired assistant to a high-powered businessman. Over dinner in a swanky restaurant, complete with plastic flowers in cut glass vases, gold-rimmed urns on the marble floor and Zeus-like statues atop pedestals, she filled my ears.

“Women in Azerbaijan have opportunities, many more than under communism, but we must work harder than men who are preferred for every position. My friend recently interviewed for a sales manager position. She met every requirement. Do you know what they told her? ‘We want a man for the job.’” Svetlana snorted.

“That’s outrageous! I can’t believe he actually said that to her face!”

Svetlana shrugged her shoulders. “Do not be so serious. This is our way. Be content that I have a good job. We will change slowly if change comes at all. You cannot understand.” Eager to practise English, she shared more. “Most girls in Baku marry at nineteen or twenty, younger still in the countryside.”

“But you are twenty-four and not married?”

“I am smart. I want a career. This is not traditional. Men are not interested in my ambition,” she explained. “My parents are different, too. They encourage me to work, to be happy. They tell me to create a better life. But I am starting to worry that I will not find a husband. I am getting old.”

“Well, I’m thirty and not married, Svetlana.”

“You are too old. No one would have you here!” she laughed.

Music blasting from the speakers, Svetlana pulled me onto the dance floor where, along with several other women, we raised our arms and spun, our hands twirling around and around like pinwheels in the wind. And as we swayed to the beat of the music, my body pulsed with the liberation I had felt since deciding to embrace this whole adventure as my own. I was beginning to see the world a little differently, and at the same time was beginning to see myself a little differently. And my curiosity soared.



PACKING LIST

Three years, one suitcase. We each had to travel with a small personal bag. As my clothes frayed, I replaced them. Jim, on the other hand, came home wearing the same jeans he set off in— although he had them patched many times.

BOTH

- several dozen millennium silk scarves for gifts
- various medicines
- various medical supplies including hypodermic needles
- sleeping bags
- tent
- camping supplies
- gas and water jerry cans
- 200 Susan B. Anthony coins for gifts
- jack, car parts, tools and accessories
- extra tyre
- air compressor
- toilet seat
- 3 water filters

MINE

- 1 pair of jeans
- 2 cotton long-sleeve shirts
- 1 turtleneck
- 2 cardigans
- 1 black dress
- 3 skirts
- 1 pair of khaki pants
- 1 tank top
- 1 pair of running pants
- 2 jogging bras
- 1 sweat jacket
- 2 pairs of exercise socks
- 2 pairs of socks
- 1 pair of pantyhose
- 1 pair of loafers
- 1 pair of heels
- 1 pair of running shoes
- 3 bras
- 5 panties
- 2 scarves
- necklaces collected along the way
- 1 pair of earrings
- 1 watch
- 2 belts
- 1 hat
- 1 bathing suit
- 1 coat
- 1 Swiss Army knife

JIM'S

- 1 pair of running shoes
- 2 pairs of running socks
- 1 pair of running shorts
- 1 running shirt
- 1 running watch
- 3 pairs of underwear
- 1 pair of khakis
- 2 pairs of jeans
- 1 pair of grey flannels
- 1 blazer
- 1 traveller's jacket
- 1 traveller's shirt
- 2 sweaters
- 3 dress shirts
- 3 polo shirts
- 2 bow ties
- 1 pair of loafers
- 2 pairs of argyle socks
- 1 pair of black socks
- toiletries
- 2 shortwave radios
- 1 money belt
- 1 cap
- 1 Swiss Army knife

MUSIC LIST

These are the CDs that carried us around the world.

“Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind,
flight to the imagination and life to everything.”

—Plato

OUR CHOICES

Beethoven New York Philharmonic
Symphony No. 9

Bob Dylan
Best of Bob Dylan

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Eine kleine Nachtmusik Berlin
Philharmonic

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major,
K. 543 New York Philharmonic
Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551

Willie Nelson
Greatest Hits (And Some That Will Be)

Richard Strauss
An Alpine Symphony, Op. 64
Berlin Philharmonic
Concerto No. 1 for Horn & Orchestra,
Op. 11

Sergei Rachmaninoff
Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

MINE

Grateful Dead
Hundred Year Hall (two discs)

Aretha Franklin
Greatest Hits (two discs)

Lauryn Hill
The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill

Hole
Celebrity Skin

Pretenders
The Singles

Sade
The Best of Sade

James Taylor
Greatest Hits

JIM'S

Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson
Storytellers

Patsy Cline
12 Greatest Hits

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None of this would have happened without: Edmund Wee, Eldes Tran (my terrific editor) and the Epigram Books team for taking a chance on me; Diane Palmer, for your eagle eye; Grace Thomas, for the title; Mom and Dad, for being the best parents, cheerleaders and believers; Jim, for your support (albeit sometimes only after I kick you in the shin!) down the many roads I traipse; Happy and Bee, for your love and patience since my #momfails are countless; and many unnamed Super Women and ordinary women, for inspiring me and giving me the courage to pen my story, flaws and all.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paige Parker moved from New York to Singapore more than a decade ago, and is a board member, patron and fundraiser for various organisations, including the Singapore Committee for UN Women, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, National Gallery of Singapore and Singapore Dance Theatre.

She supports and promotes Singapore talent, be it in design, jewellery, the arts or fashion. She is a freelance writer and a graduate gemologist through the Gemological Institute of America.

Paige is a member of the Circumnavigators Club and the Explorers Club. She and her husband, Jim Rogers, have two daughters, Happy and Bee. Singapore is their home by choice. Follow her on @iampaigeparker and @dontcallmemrsrogers.

DONTCALLMEMRSROGERS.COM

When a young Paige Parker meets investment guru Jim Rogers, little does she know the immense world she would see and, eventually, seek to change.

Jim takes her on a three-year road trip to set a Guinness World Record, but it is Paige who soon takes the steering wheel and makes the journey her own.

On the epic drive, Paige's worldview is turned upside down. She meets women from every walk of life, monks in China, boy soldiers in Angola and oppressive patriarchy in too many countries. Yet she walks away with a profound faith in humankind, and ultimately makes her home in Singapore.



“To witness her education by the world and her coming of age was to see a beautiful, intelligent naïf become the woman she is today...eager to do good and bring change.”

—Jim Rogers, in the afterword

“In her raw honesty, Paige...finds her voice and her passion to give back.”

—Georgette Tan, president of the Singapore Committee for UN Women

“Paige's heartfelt description of her remarkable journey around the world offers thrilling adventures.”

—Geoffrey Kent, author of *Safari: A Memoir of a Worldwide Travel Pioneer*



NON-FICTION

ISBN-13: 978-981-46-5525-5



9 789814 655255

www.epigrambooks.sg