

Fearless: Hilarious and Horrible Stories from an Absurd Life Spent in the Woods

Alison Monda

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Fearless is a memoir that leads by example with its inspiring stories of bravery and facing challenges head-on.

Alison Monda's humorous memoir *Fearless* deals with growth and self-discovery in times of adversity.

Opening with the story of Monda's near-fatal solo backpacking trip in the rainy, foggy mountains of New Zealand, this book fast establishes that its subject was always a bit wild. When trying out for a school play, she was told that she didn't fit in, which she took to mean that she was too fat to fit into the costume, leading to a period of anorexia. When she got older, she started binge drinking and wound up in a rehabilitation facility. Such adventures helped her to find her true self and to seek peace in the wilderness.

Anecdotes pervade the book, as with those about hiking excursions amid horny, singing elk; a hungry skunk trying to break into her tent; and colorful fellow hikers. There are also a handful of dramatic scenes, such as those about Monda rolling down a cliff in pursuit of her dropped phone, hiking in a blizzard, and getting lost while dehydrated in a desert. And between stories of dangerous hikes are updates on her romantic life and her work toward becoming a firefighter.

Indeed, the book's organization is haphazard, jumping from one experience into another. Still, the stories are somewhat chronological, if timing isn't often mentioned to help outside audience acclimate to their progression.

Sarcasm and self-deprecating humor run rampant, and expletives and innuendos are present throughout. Such earthy moments are interlaced with beautiful nature writing about sites along the Pacific Crest Trail and the Te Araroa Trail, among other places, as with the observation of

massive roots that crawled all over the trail—the varicose veins of Mother Nature—and the rest of the trail ... plastered in the kind of mud that leaves hickies on boots.

Hiking jargon and the names of points along the trails Monda hiked are not always accompanied by context, though. The book's personal photographs have a more humanizing effect, as with a childhood picture of Monda in a bowl cut, a selfie taken during a torrential downpour, and a picture of a painful-looking eye infection.

A vibrant narrative that leads by example with its inspiring stories of bravery and facing challenges head-on, *Fearless* is a hilarious, empowering memoir about adventurous living on the wild side.

ASHLEY HOLSTROM (October 15, 2024)

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