

Who Will Accompany You? My Mother-Daughter Journeys Far from Home and Close to the Heart

Meg Stafford

Kate Stafford, Contributor

Gale Stafford, Contributor

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The thoughtful travel memoir Who Will Accompany You? is about shared adventures and reinvigorated mother-daughter bonds.

Meg Stafford's travel memoir *Who Will Accompany You?* is about how caring for her daughters while globetrotting inspired her to let go.

Stafford, who traveled with her daughters Kate and Gale in their young adulthoods, learned to let her children make their own decisions—sometimes against her protective maternal instincts. She first writes about Kate's high school trip to Nepal and Bhutan, which was inspired by an independent class project researching happiness. Stafford chaperoned the trip, with the exception of Kate's brief side trip to a Buddhist monastery while Stafford and her friend climbed in the Himalayas (her descriptions of heading to the Annapurna Base Camp are beautiful and sensory). And Gale's interests in Spanish-language cultures led her to pursue peace activism in Colombia, aiding a Fellowship of Reconciliation group. With those travels, Stafford had to contend with fear for her daughter's safety, though she also felt pride over Gale's convictions and hard work.

Stafford's narration is interspersed with Kate's journal entries and some email excerpts, revealing, in turn, warm mother-daughter feelings, the women's individual curiosity about new surroundings, and their ethical motivations in traveling, as with considerations of other people's needs. Indeed, early on and in the course of later travels, the women learned to focus on both "connection and independence" as they moved through the world, forging a delicate interplay between strengthening their personal relationships with one another and taking risks while venturing far from home. They faced common travel problems too: they were sometimes unfamiliar with the cultures that they encountered; they longed for home; they endured illnesses abroad. Still, they met each experience with aplomb.

The prose is cheerful and enthusiastic, and the explorations that it recounts are covered with infectious enthusiasm. Still, these memories are often straightforward and sparing when it comes to details. Aphorisms arise as well ("It feels good to stretch ourselves. Possibility lies within our capability"). And the journal excerpts, while they are honest in tone, often cover topics (including meditation and Buddhism) without fresh revelations. Indeed, in the book's back-and-forth narration, the women's voices run parallel to one another's; there's not enough of a distinction between their sections in the end. The book's conclusion is cheerful and inspiring, though, reiterating the idea that interpersonal relationships are of the utmost importance.

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KAREN RIGBY (June 28, 2023)

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