

@your library

CONNECT *Dream* DISCOVER
News & Reviews by Roz Weedman
Community Relations Coordinator



Keeping it simple – books about lonesome endeavors

While we stay home more than most of us are used to, it buys us time for reflection and an appreciation of what is most essential in our lives. Although we've been forced into it due to a pandemic, others have written about intentional experiences of a more isolated life – for a while anyway.

An American classic written in 1854, Henry David Thoreau's **Walden Pond** discusses his efforts at leading an intentionally simple life. He is sometimes credited with being the first American environmentalist. His goal wasn't to avoid all contact with others (which is sort of the goal of our own stay at home situation) but to be self-sufficient, able to live alone and appreciate nature. He did this at Walden Pond for two years. Apparently without a trace of irony, he emerged from this existence in the simple cabin because he felt he had "many lives yet to live" and was done wasting time on that one. Still – his book is a good read. And usually we don't have to do something forever in order for it to change some habits and perspectives.

A favorite of mine is Charles Lindbergh's book **We**, published only two months after his 1927 solo trans-Atlantic flight, the first person to accomplish this. I recall reading this around middle school and found it fascinating. The pronoun "we" presumably meant Lindbergh and his plane, The Spirit of St. Louis, the number one thing I wanted to see at the Smithsonian my first trip there. It is a tiny little plane. Apparently, he later groused that he meant "we" to be him and his financial backers, rather than the more spiritual interpretation, but he did seem to have quite an emotional connection to his plane.

The Autobiography of Malcom X, published in 1965 posthumously, has been called by Time Magazine as recently as 1998 one of the top ten required non-fiction books. His co-author, Alex Haley, was responsible for its publication after Malcom X's assassination. Of course, there's the Michigan connection where Malcom X spent his early childhood. The reason I'm including it on this list is because of the prison years. While certainly prison isn't an "alone" experience, it is a separation experience from one's normal life. His self-education, through literally memorizing the dictionary and reading everything he could, changed his life and subsequently many others.

Jack Kerouac wrote **Lonesome Traveler** in 1960, one of many autobiographical works by the voice of the Beat Generation. It's a collection of essays and stories about his solo travels

throughout the United States and various other countries. It has the elements you'd expect in a beat generation book and in many ways set the tone for this post-modern period.

Cheryl Strayed's 2012 book **Wild**, documenting her thousand-mile trek along the Pacific Crest Trail, has been particularly well received with readers in the library's Books for Lunch Bunch, was an Oprah pick, and also on NPR's and other best of the year lists. She made her journey after losing her mother, seeing her family break up, and then going through her own divorce. She re-set her inner compass on a trip that was, to say the least, challenging.

There are certainly many books of lesser fame that have been written about the experience of separating from our normal routines and lives. Perhaps collectively they tell us that what we are experiencing isn't only a trial but an opportunity to check our own compasses as we eventually emerge. Unlike the authors of these books, we really are "alone together" as we all stay home – with the internet and Zoom.

How long after all this will the first books be published on staying home and social distancing? How will they feel different than these books? And who among you will be writing them?

Looking forward to seeing you again at the Library.