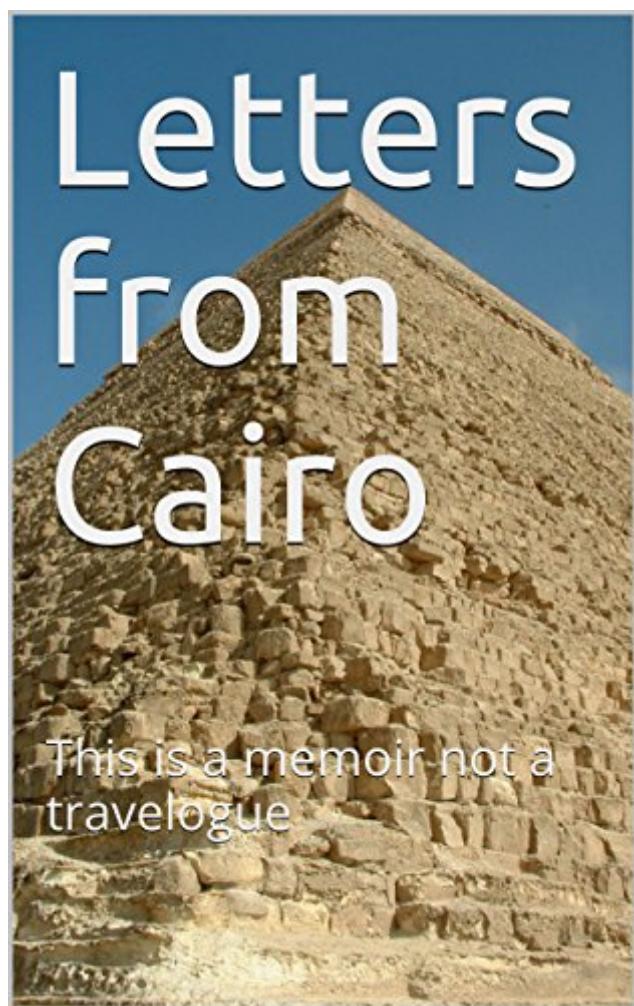


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Letters From Cairo: This Is A Memoir Not A Travelogue



Synopsis

Letters from Cairo chronicles my life in Cairo while on an overseas posting with my husband between 2002 and 2004. The book is interspersed with photographs and letters that I wrote to family and friends back home in Scotland. The letters recount my amusement, delight and frustration with the daily difficulties of living in a third world city. Sometimes they echo an event written in the main text but that illustrates how differently I projected my experience in the letters. The main text of the book paints the more complete picture and is a darker, more poignant tale. We lived in Cairo in a time of increasing local hostility to Westerners, the onset and continuation of the Iraq War. The book is a true reflection of how living in Cairo affected me and to some extent all other expatriates. Some of the letters will make the reader laugh out loud. It might encourage people to have a real adventure and live in a different place, in a different world or not. Perhaps all would-be expatriates should read the book first. It also gives an insight into why the Arab Spring happened and the continuing problems in the Middle-East and North Africa. I hope it will allow the readers some compassion for how difficult life can be in an unstable and poor country for indigenous and visiting residents. I have related a little of my unusual personal background which may explain why I had such a unique perspective of living in Egypt. My Irish mother immigrated to the US in the early 1950s and married my father, a Hispanic American, in 1959. He had a troubled past and possibly had an undiagnosed mental illness. I was born prematurely in San Francisco and when I was a toddler we went on a trip to Europe ending up at my maternal Grandmother's house in Scotland. My father flew off to the States saying he would send tickets and I am still waiting. My mother was a loving single mother who was devastated by her failed marriage. She, too, had an underlying mental illness and had a severe mental breakdown in the 1970s. Treatment was less sophisticated with numerous rounds of electric shock therapy and ineffective medication. Subsequently, she deteriorated into a haze of alcoholism making my teenage life very unhappy and difficult. I married at 21 to my wonderful husband but perhaps might have waited a little longer had life not seemed so hopeless. My husband and I travelled extensively while posted in Egypt - Malaysia, Dubai, Europe and USA and this is narrated in the book. I didn't usually travel with my husband when we lived in Scotland but I was unable to stay by myself in Cairo so every cloud has a silver lining. The Epilog, which is my final letter, is hilarious yet distressing and somehow encapsulates the intense flavour of our time spent in Egypt. In the title I write, This is a memoir not a travelogue, and as you read the book you will see that Cairo is just the backdrop to my deteriorating mental health. The stressful conditions of living there exacerbated my existing condition and it is miraculous that I managed to cope with living there,

albeit with fantastic medical help. I was surprised at the high quality of medical care in some respects, not in others. My struggle might give readers, with their own problems, hope that almost any situation can be manageable and perhaps feel blessed that they don't live in such an environment. Much of the book describes our relationship with the various feral street animals that entered our lives. It both grounded and stressed me looking after so many animals in need but we loved them so much that we took three street cats back to America. Astonishingly, given their poor early start in life they are all still alive aged between 12 and 13. We adore them and they have cost many thousands of dollars to both transport and get specialist help for. We moved directly from Egypt to Houston, Texas and although it was another culture shock, it was far more pleasant. I have

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Customer Reviews

As I also lived for two years in Cairo, though, 20 years before this author, I was eager to read about her experiences. We lived in the same suburb of the city but her experience and mine were very different. I have not finished it yet but am getting tired of reading about her mental state. I was hoping to read more about her exploration of Cairo, the people she met, and daily life. However, it is HER experience and not mine, so take what I say with a grain of salt. I should have written my own

"memoir".

Great entertaining book. Loved it!

The author is a natural storyteller and in Letters from Cairo she tells of her two-year stay in the capital of Egypt, occasioned by her husband's job transfer. It is a very personal account and, by her own admission, doesn't purport to being a travelogue or guide. Those can be found in profusion elsewhere. From first impressions upon arrival, to house hunting and finding a villa, daily life and work, social events and finally return to the United States, all are written with clarity, enthusiasm and humour. Without being over-wordy and descriptive the author constantly paints pictures of the environs, the characters she encounters, the alien culture and the difficulties associated with it. But more than this, it is an achingly honest account of how she has to cope with her inherited mental illness in this new life. She volunteers for working with sick animals and other charities but this in itself brings more stress. She and her husband retreat at times to the ubiquitous bolthole of an expatriates' bar which offers the illusion of escape from reality, at least for a while. But there is always humour, a sense of the ridiculous which makes the story so readable. Neither is there any subject which the author is shy about talking about, and at no time does she try to gloss her weaknesses or to put herself in a better light. The reader of this book will be entertained certainly but will also learn more than they possibly expected from some excellent storytelling.

Having never visited Cairo (admittedly, I've never wanted to), I found this book a fascinating doorway into a world completely different from mine, and it's one of the best things a book can do. It also provides a revealing look behind the eyes of someone who has struggled with mental illness. From her cheerful appearance and kind demeanor, you'd never know it. (Full disclosure: the author and her husband have been my next-door neighbors for over 7 years.) The chapters move along quickly, unspooling humorous anecdotes of adventure, journeys through new cultures and plenty of warm, fuzzy animal tales. Despite the subtitle, this truly is a travelogue of self-discovery.

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