A Poem Traveled Down My Arm:
Poems and Drawings by Alice Walker

Something For Everyone

In this illuminating book, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and acclaimed poet Alice Walker reveals her remarkable philosophy of life. Curiously, this labor of love started with the author’s signature: Faced with the daunting task of providing autographs for multiple copies of one of her poetry collections, Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth, Walker turned an act of repetition into an act of inspiration. For each autograph became something more than a name: a thoughtful reflection, an impromptu sketch, a heartfelt poem. The result is this spontaneous burst of the unexpected. A Poem Traveled Down My Arm is a lovely collection of insights and drawings—by turns charming and humorous, provocative and profound—that represent the wisdom of one of today’s most beloved writers.

The essence of Walker’s independent spirit emanates from words and images that are simple but deep in meaning. An empowering approach to life...the inspiration to live completely in the moment...the chance to nurture one's creativity and peace of mind—all these beautiful elements are evoked by this unusual and original book.

My Personal Review:
Many book buyers prefer prose because poets often take two stanzas to say what can be said in a well-crafted phrase. The poetry section is usually one of the smallest sections in a bookstore. Poets often use substitution, excessive description, and analogy, when speaking directly may be more clear. But Alice Walker does not suffer from any of those poetic tendencies. Her poems are brief and plain speaking, but there is nothing plain about the extraordinary intelligence her words reveal. I’m an Alice Walker fan, but I wasn't looking to buy a book of her poems. I was actually scanning through different collections of poetry from another infamous and radical American poet whose last name also starts with "W."
One of life's great gifts is that you often find some of the best treasures not directly where you are headed, but on the nearby paths.

The title "A Poem Traveled Down My Arm" reminded me of a good lyric "The movement you need is on your shoulder." The book is a "story about exhaustion. About deciding to quit. About attempting to give up what it is not in one's power to give up: one's connection to the Source. Being taught this lesson. Ultimately it is a story about Creativity, the force that surges and ebbs in all of us, and links us to the Divine." Here are a few lines to give you a sense of the book, first on the topics of love, human understanding, and relationships:

"Every time you die you live differently."
"Feed the stranger under your coat."
"She comes from heaven unannounced."
"What is a promise if not your hand in mine?"
"Release the tyranny of gender: Make love not programming."
"Man reborn as woman do not give in to fear."

And as any good oracle or commentator, Alice Walker does not avoid issues that dominate our world:

"Understanding war I do not harm myself."
"There is no "Other" only you - at war."
"How can we rest thinking of their burning legs? What is the balm for consciousness?"
"No gadget in all Creation to distract us forever from our grief."
"Choose one country other than your own to love. Keep a finger on its pulse."

And 2 of my personal favorites:

"Choose someone to love who wouldn't even hear of it. Notice ducks."
"No one can end suffering except through dance."

I don't know why these ideas came to Ms. Walker's consciousness at this time, or why she chose these select ideas to publish. But I am grateful, because they were timely for me. To find them, you must go places most people choose not to go. You might be asking "Yes, but over 10 bucks for a book of single clause pages and scribbles?" Going back to my opening point, Alice Walker can reveal more uncommon wisdom in a clause than most people can reveal in a chapter, an essay, or a state of the union address. The book is a valuable asset. "There is only kindness lucid, strong in the moment like sunlight penetrating a gloomy glade. The offer of empathy or tea or soup or bread a bed."

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