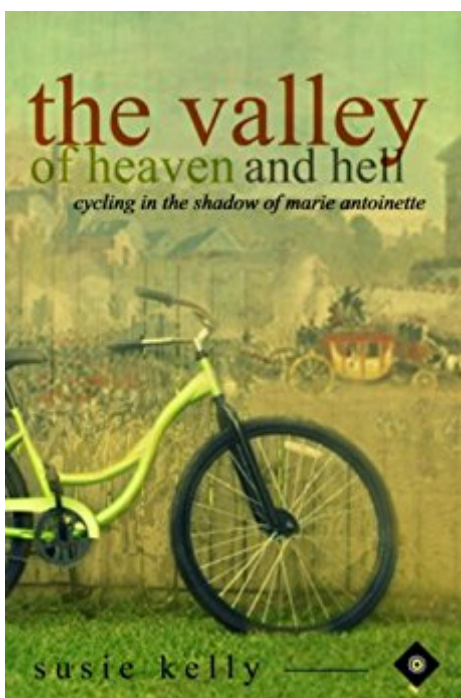




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The Valley Of Heaven And Hell: Cycling In The Shadow Of Marie Antoinette



Synopsis

A quirky, hilarious and endearing mix of personal travel adventure and French history. Susie's cycling adventure follows the route taken by Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette on their abortive escape from the French Revolution and their journey back to their executions. After a hair-raising journey through Paris that nearly ends in her own execution by traffic, she finds a little-known area of northern France full of history, flowing with champagne, with calm waterways and tranquil countryside bursting with history. Idyllic territory for cyclists. But cyclist she is not. By suggesting an electric bicycle that will get her through the uphill slogs, her husband persuades her that travelling on two wheels is by far the best way to see the little-known, virtually undocumented part of France. From Paris and Versailles, she wobbles on to the vineyards and champagne cellars of Epernay and Reims, then through the Marne valley, the scene of unimaginable horror and devastation during World War 1. In three weeks Susie and Terry cycle 500 miles, dining sometimes in luxury and often on weird makeshift meals in their tent. Along the way there are traumas, epiphanies, occasional matrimonial disagreements and the odd glass of champagne. "There are a handful of authors who achieve that elusive trick of making you laugh out loud. For me it's James Herriot, Bill Bryson and Susie Kelly." French Entertainment Magazine "This book manages to combine history, humor and the best of travel writing all in one." US Rev "This was a trip I enjoyed taking through Susie Kelly's eyes, both for what I learned about the area of France she traveled, and the history involved. My backside and the muscles in my legs were much happier doing it this way, too." Big Al's Books & Pals "A wonderful combination of travel memoir, funny anecdotes with the added bonus of weaving throughout an easily digestible history lesson." UK Rev "This is a book I could read again and again." US Rev "As someone who enjoys reading about travel on foot or bicycle I can say it's as good as any I've read and is a massively entertaining and satisfying read." US Rev "When it's funny it's laugh-out-loud funny, and when it's sad it is heart-breaking." UK Rev "This book manages to combine history, humor & the best of travel writing all in one." US Rev "Travel humor that makes you cry as well. Quite something!" US Rev "Susie rides again! Susie has done it again. This is a thoroughly entertaining read combining self deprecating honest comments with lesser known historical tales and anecdotes." UK Rev Just loved it! In the first chapter I thought the pace was so entertaining and interesting that it would not be possible for the book to keep it up...but it does. Fun and full of detail. US Rev.

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Customer Reviews

What happens when an adrenaline-junkie guy who loves speed, dangerous traffic, and cellars goes on a long bicycle tour with his timid, claustrophobic wife who likes to stop and smell the roses? Surprisingly, the story doesn't end in murder and mayhem, although the author clearly considered it a few times. Any wife will sympathize. Kelly is an English ex-pat happily settled into a tiny village in rural France. When a friend offers to house-sit and care for their animals, she and her husband embark on a cycling tour of the Marne Valley - the heart of France and the site of much of its blood-stained history. As she tries to keep up with her husband's frenetic pace, she speculates on the historic events from the French Revolution to the two World Wars that have taken place in this strip of now-peaceful country land. I never before appreciated how France's position smack in the middle of Europe has subjected her to so much blood-shed and horror. And what atrocities other countries have failed to provide, the French have, sadly, committed on each other. How to explain the French Revolution and its aftermath, in which wave after wave of leaders rose by slaughtering the opposition only to eventually follow them to the scaffold? Can a people suddenly go collectively

mad or was it a build-up of centuries of frustration? Kelly is such a likable woman and her quirky personality makes her books delightful reading. That she is also a thoughtful, intelligent, and well-read is a huge bonus. This is the third of her books that I've read and I devoured every one of them and am always sorry to finish them. She seems to have a large, well-deserved following. If you love good non-fiction, you should discover her as soon as possible.

I wanted to give this 4.5 stars, but that wasn't an option. Simply, I really enjoyed this book. Susie Kelly is erudite, opinionated, funny and warm-hearted. She and her husband experience (and survive) many experiences: some horrific, some plain irritating, some hilarious, many just wonderful. The people they meet can be placed on the same spectrum. I want to read more books by this author. I'm surprised she doesn't have an entry in Wikipedia. Many less worthy people do. Pity. As a side note - from time to time in this book, Kelly comments on the awful experiences she endured in Catholic school. She's clearly disenchanted with the Church. She writes that she hesitates entering a Catholic church because of the uncomfortable associations it brings. However, in two situations that she describes as 'epiphanies' she enters a Catholic church and is overcome with emotion. She puts this down to the peacefulness or beauty of the particular church she's in. She makes it very clear it has nothing to do with Christianity. "I didn't want to pray a rosary, or go to mass or read the Bible from cover to cover," she writes about her second 'epiphany'. I find this odd that somebody as clever as she doesn't connect the feelings she experiences in these places with the reason these places exist. I am a Catholic and so understand that Christ is physically present in these churches and I cannot help but feel certain that has some bearing on what she felt in those places. To be fair, later in the book she analyses her appreciation for the sumptuous beauty of Saint Chappelle church but her disgust with the sumptuousness of Versailles Palace. She concludes, "One was built for the glory of God and one for the glorification of power."

This has been an eye opening book for me. This is not one of Rick Steve's famous travels around France, no, this is a story for people like you and me, that are just regular people. This book is written by someone who looks at the world around her, not with Rose colored glasses but what I call Real World Glasses. I have always been interested in French history. This book brought to light the life and experiences, both on a present day bike tour and the long forgotten travels of a King and Queen who lost everything. I thoroughly enjoyed this one.

I was browsing on my kindle for my next book to read. I checked the books of Bill Bryson, but have

read most of what I wanted to of his. I had already read two of Ms. Kellys' books and was confident that I would enjoy this one. Not only was the book very entertaining but she provided many very interesting facts in the lives and demise of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. She encounters countless war memorials during her trip. Her descriptions of the horrors and destruction of the multiple wars France has been involved in are touching/saddening/depressing. Her story encompasses all the aspects of her, and her husbands', cycling trip and was a very good read. I'm looking forward to the next book of hers that I will read.

The second Susie Kelly book that I've had the pleasure to read. I love the descriptive anecdotes and conversations with her husband. I found their cycling travels to be quite relatable. Kelly does a lovely job at weaving the history of a region quite well from the path taken by the truly last French Totals to the tales of WW I and WW II. I'll definitely read another book by the author.

Great combining of Susie's travels paralleling the flight of Marie Antoinette and family. This was a good opportunity to learn the personal story of the royal family and the French Revolution. I also enjoyed the opportunity to follow Susie through modern day travels along the Marne.

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