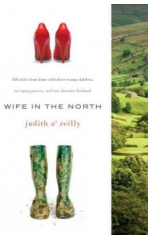


Wife in the North



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Wife in the North is Judith O'Reilly's memoir about facilitating her husband's dream of leaving London and moving to the countryside in Northumberland. O' Reilly, who is literate, urbane, and immensely funny decidedly fits the city girl mold. She likes richly-frothed cappuccinos, museum meanderings, and rides on crimson double-decker buses. Several years before the start of this journal, O'Reilly's husband talked her into buying a holiday cottage near the sea. He promised to never consider living there full-time.

But two and a half kids later--while she's pregnant with their third child--he does beg her to move there, and overwhelmed by hormones, she reluctantly agrees with the caveat that after two years, if she does not like it, they can return to London.

In a previous life, before having children, she was an award-winning journalist who covered national education issues and hobnobbed with leaders. She enjoyed her fast-paced life and her cosmopolitan friends. This book is one of the best I've read about a career woman immersing herself in and adapting to domestic life.

And what a hard adaptation it is. Although Northumberland has more castles than anywhere else in England it has few bookstores and no decent cappuccinos. But it does have rocky crags, deep forests, and best, a wild seacoast. In the first six months after delivering her daughter, Judith rails against leaving the city but still cannot help admiring the beauty of the place. She is also drawn to the farmers, sheep herders, castle owners and neighbors who live there.

To protect the privacy of her new and old friends, she gives everyone amusing titles. These include: Yorkshire Mother, Oyster Farmer, Gay Best Boyfriend, Riding Pal, London Diva, and the Evangelicals. Her blog titles--she began this book as a blog--are funny too: "Weapons of Mass Destruction" about her breasts while nursing, "Missing Keys 3" and "Welcome to the Deserted Village."

Over the several year period of this memoir, a lot happens. Particularly touching are the sections about her aging parents. At one point she says of them, "I want them to live in my wardrobe, safe from the mishaps of old age." She also writes of the joys, sorrows, surprises, and annoyances of raising small children. When the little ones complain about her singing, she says, "Children like to keep their songbirds caged and dark."

One section of the book offers a timely theme. Judith discusses the bullying of her oldest son in the local school. Her blogging about this creates a few enemies among the mothers of the village. But in the end, her honesty, ideas about how to stop the bullying, and most likely her humor, helped to assuage any ill-feelings.

This book offers so much: an in-depth look at parenting, friendship, and learning how to recreate yourself in a new and utterly different environment. All of it is written in beautiful prose.

For a more historical take on this subject, consider one of my favorite books, *Two in the Far North* by Margaret Murie, about her life in Alaskan villages while accompanying her husband on his biological field-work. Think reindeers and northern lights.

Posted by Dory L. on July 12, 2012

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