



The Walker Rebel Yell

For four generations the maternal side of my family has been held captive by wanderlust, and, until recently, not one of the Walker women has had the pieces of her life fall together so that she was able to do anything about it. Children and husbands, crops and cattle, and putting food on the table have taken precedence. Other than seeing the world as a gypsy (my mother was close), exploration has not been possible.

That's not to say the women before me didn't travel. My great-grandmother came to Oklahoma from Missouri in a covered wagon. And my grandmother came and went to California for work during the depression. My mother was even born in California. You say that doesn't constitute travel? They would all have bitterly and resentfully agreed.

As much as the women in my family tried to embrace and be satisfied by the comfortable stride of habit's familiarity, they all failed. They were robust, independent, bright, witty women, roamers in spirit, wanderers at heart and rebellious dreamers. Their lives paid a high price for that lust. A multitude of husbands, divorces, and general mayhem followed on their heels like dust devils of the Oklahoma dirt they toiled. The men associated with my lineage were either inappropriate choices from the start, or unable to withstand the onslaught of what turned out to be a tornado disguised as a beguiling female.

I've listened to the stories my mother tells about the Walker women and winced at the bad judgment in men, the lives laced with ramshackle poverty, and the gall displayed in escaping situations they seemed to repeatedly fall into. One theme courses throughout: they emerged with their heads held high, children by their side, and not a dime to their names. Among these women, few material goods have been passed down. I came from poor stock, but even as a child it nagged at me, and for years I felt slighted by the lack of objects woven with familial history; the absence of land spun with stories of acquisition.

As a teenager, the Walker women's restlessness raged within me. I dreamed of travel and spoke often of the Peace Corps, but it was my shallow disdain for being poor that made the greatest imprint. The poverty that had bolted my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother to the dirt of leased land had to be banished. My course to escape was unwavering. I won every 4-H and FHA award in the system and graduated Valedictorian of my high school class. Every day was a focused exercise to ensure that upon graduation from Soper High School, the cattle, pigs, chickens, garden, canning jars, and hay fields of my youth would never see my sweating visage again. The college scholarships offered in my junior year assured I was on track.

Certain that the spell of bad domestic choices had run its course and confident my life was destined to be different, I proceeded to become an Oklahoma teenage pregnancy statistic. My youth was spent raising a son and battling to stay in a marriage that had three strikes against it from the start – youth, teenage parenthood, and the Walker wanderlust bloodline.

The marriage lasted 12 years before my heart withered and the last breath of life was sucked out.

I called it quits. Devastated at the mess I'd created and suffering from paralyzing insecurity, I somehow emerged as the women had

before me, head high, son by my side. I also held a degree from Southern Methodist University, a CPA license, and CFP (Certified Financial Planner) professional license in hand. That overachiever in high school may have run into some obstacles and taken a few detours, but she knew what to do when she rounded the corner.

Weeks after the divorce was final, a brochure for a white water float trip down the Green River came to the office and landed on my desk. Over the next year, I scraped together the money and took off for Utah in my 1968 canary yellow, rusted-out Mustang coupe.

The solo road trip changed my life. Two days of silence broken only by moments of brief connection with the sounds coming from the Mustang caused the schizophrenic collision of everyday thoughts to cease. Moments of clarity returned, deep breaths to my core forced out the fear and trepidation. I interacted with every person I encountered with no interference of expectation or environment, and a comfort level with how to act and what to say. I was returned to myself, empowered and completely hooked on solo traveling.

Solo road trips strike fear in the hearts of many. Either the brain conjures up "solitary confinement" and goes downhill from there, or the thought of a road trip disgorges memories of the family sedan and Dad's mission to see America at 55 miles per hour. The trips are not about getting away, rather going somewhere... with yourself. I read an article that recommended spending some time on a psychological sofa before heading out on a solo road trip. I beg to differ. The trip is the psychological sofa. And there's no astronomical bill attached. Solo road trips are liberating, empowering and rejuvenating. Yet most have never taken one. Many people can face down a room of professionals in a boardroom, but not the prospect of being alone.

After a decade of being happily single, I married again and this time I did it well, and right. My solo road trips took a four-year hiatus. Then one morning that damned Walker wanderlust raised its head. "Honey, I need a solo road trip." The truth was out. He turned to me with a wry smile and said, "What took you so long?" He made only one request - no sleeping in the truck. Deal. I no longer had to wedge my gear into a small car; he lovingly loaded a suitcase, my camera gear, a full ice chest, emergency items, and bid me on my way. Eight days in the embrace of solitude with no schedule. Time stopped. And for the first time in a long time, I had the luxury to consider the fate of the Walker women.

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MY RELATIONSHIPS

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touched her hand and paused. "Let's have breakfast." She opened her eyes and softened her expression. She remembered him. He took a deep breath – a sigh of relief.

Several days later, she stopped drinking and eating unless persuaded. She slept a lot and did not say much. Then, my father heard a thud from the bathroom and found my mother unconscious on the floor. He crawled down beside her and cried her name as he called 911. She opened her eyes for him and sat up, but the paramedics recommended hospitalization.

In the hospital, she awoke only to wave her arms at her hallucinations. She remembered no one, except my father, and smiled as she memorized his face just before she floated back into deep sleep. Since then, there have been ups and downs: assisted living, going home again, a broken hip, hospitalization, and now hip replacement surgery. Nearly a century of memories have drifted away, but the bond between my parents remains impenetrable. He loves her. She is his girl. *Mia*

MY TRAVELS

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My siblings and I have all had sons. There are no daughters to carry on the Walker women legacy, a fact I'm certain saddens my Mom. But my son inherited the wanderlust gene along with several other Walker traits, hopefully mostly the good ones. Five generations of explorers later, one of us speaks a foreign language (Mandarin) and has traveled extensively. He and I spent four weeks backpacking rural China in 2008 – a dream come true for the three generations of women before me.

Well into my 40s, I see the lack of inherited antiques, jewelry, and land in a much different light. When my son and his fiancé said they hoped to have a girl someday to carry on the Walker women legacy, I understood what had been passed down was far greater than things. A spirit of independence, a lust for discovery, open-mindedness born of tolerance, a penchant for learning, optimism regarding what lies beyond the bend, scrappiness, strength of character and personality – these things are the gifts to future generations that never need polishing or homeowner's insurance. I'm proud to be an owner.

My Mom is still without a passport, but plans are being made to take her to France. She will set foot on foreign soil. And whichever occurs first – either the birth of a great-granddaughter or my mother's touchdown at Charles de Gaulle airport – the world will reverberate with a Walker rebel yell. *Mia*

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