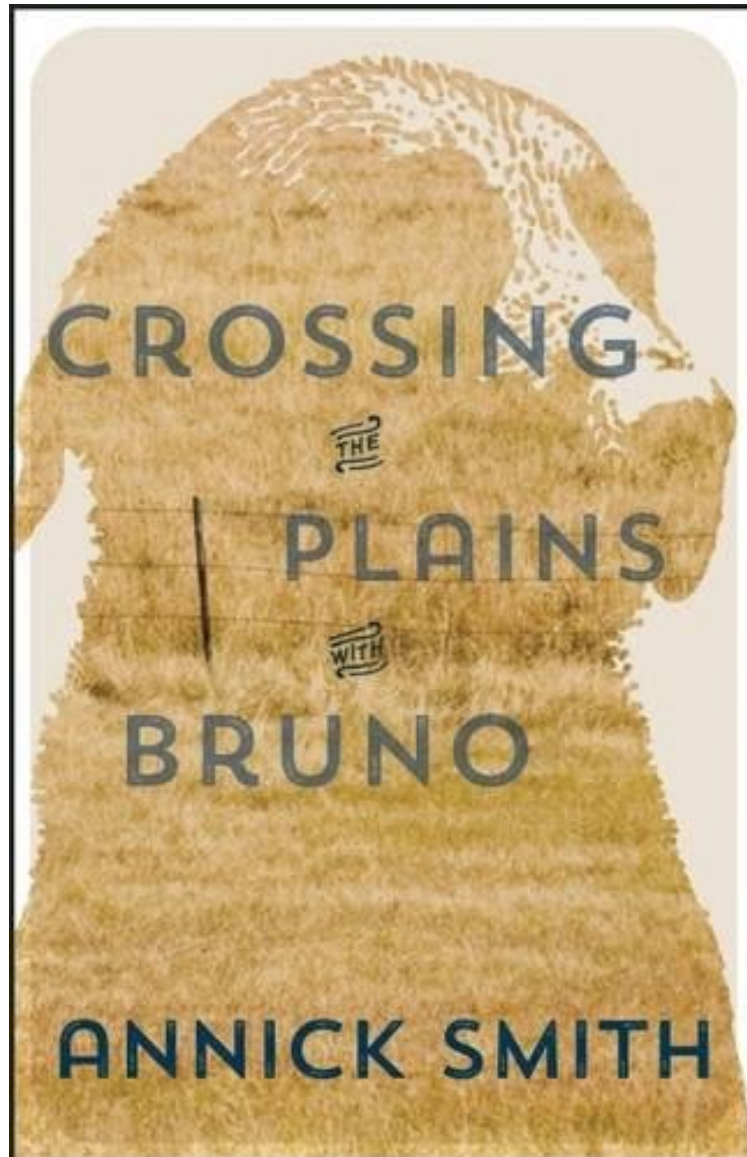


Crossing the Plains with Bruno

Annick Smith

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Annick Smith : Crossing the Plains with Bruno before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Crossing the Plains with Bruno:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great story tellingBy PuzlGreat story telling. Emotions clear and honest. Family and aging, dog love, nostalgia for childhood and memories plus a good travel story-- wonderful read.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well done...By Gail PickusA wonderfully written book...2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An unconventional memoir that would be valued more by the author's family than

by perfect strangers

By R. M. Peterson

In May 2003, three years shy of seventy, Annick Smith drove from Montana to Chicago to visit her ninety-seven-year-old mother. With her, Smith took her chocolate Lab, Bruno. In *CROSSING THE PLAINS WITH BRUNO*, Smith uses that two-week trip as the anchor for an unconventional memoir. She reflects on her parents -- Old World Jews, her mother from Transylvania and her father from Budapest, who met in Paris (where Annick was born) and eventually settled in Chicago and its suburbs. She shares memories of growing up, of her siblings, her first husband Dave Smith, her children, literary friends such as Dick Hugo and Jim Welch, and her long-time partner Bill Kittredge. At the same time, the book is a travelogue of those two weeks in May 2003, including a week at a cottage on the shores of Lake Michigan. It also is a platform for assorted observations about contemporary life in America. Smith wrote the book about ten years later, and she includes updates on a few matters -- including the death of her mother and the death of Bruno. She characterizes the book as "a mix of travel and relationships, Western history and family history, human love and animal love." That it certainly is. It also is a primer on loss, and accepting and integrating loss into one's life. Smith has gathered a fair measure of wisdom over the years, and she imparts it in a smoothly written book. But all that does not automatically make for an especially interesting book. For me, Smith discusses too many personal matters -- such as girlhood body odor, her first experience skiing in Ishpeming, Michigan in 1945, and the various places she wants her ashes to be scattered. She relates too many prosaic happenings from her road trip, many having to do with Bruno and letting him exercise and relieve himself. Moreover, some of her observations on society or history are rather pedestrian. In some respects, *CROSSING THE PLAINS WITH BRUNO* seems to have been written primarily for Smith's children and grandchildren, and as an account of one's life and one's "being" to be left for one's descendants it is a fine book. For a perfect stranger, however -- at least this perfect stranger -- it is on the thin side.

Dogs, like humans, have memories, instincts, fears, and loyalties. But, as far as we know, dogs do not get swept up in nostalgia, speculation, or self-analysis. Although they have hopes, they are not driven by regrets. In *Crossing the Plains with Bruno*, Annick Smith weaves together a memoir of travel and relationship, western history and family history, human love and animal love centering around a two week road trip across the Great Plains she and her 95 pound chocolate lab, Bruno, took in the summer of 2003. It is a chain of linked meditations, often triggered by place, about how the past impinges on the present and how the present can exist seemingly sans past. Traveling from her rural homestead in Montana to pick up her nearly 100-year-old mother from her senior residence on Chicago's North Side and bring her to the family's beach house on a dune overlooking Lake Michigan, Smith often gets lost in memory and rambling contemplation. Bruno's constant companionship and ever present needs force her to return to the actual, reminding her that she, too, is an animal whose existence depends on being alert to the scents, sights, hungers, and emotions of the moment. Passing through wide open spaces, dying ranch towns, green cornfields, and Midwestern hamlets, Annick is immersed in memories of her immigrant Hungarian Jewish family, her childhood days in Chicago, her early marriage, and ultimate immigration west. Triggered by random encounters along the way, she's taken back to life as a young mother, her career as a writer and filmmaker who produced the classic *A River Runs Through It*, the death of her husband, and the thrill of a late romance. A lifetime of reflection played out one mile at a time. *Crossing the Plains with Bruno* is a story narrated by a woman beset by the processes of aging, living with the imminent reality of a parent's death, but it is the dog that rides shotgun, like Sancho Panza to Don Quixote, that becomes the reminder of the physical realities outside our own imaginations.

Praise for *Crossing the Plains*"Annick Smith invites a chocolate Labrador retriever named Bruno to hop up into her Toyota 4Runner for a road trip from her home outside Missoula, Mont., to the North Side of Chicago. But what follows is more expansive than a simple drive eastward; Smith is letting us eavesdrop on an illuminating meditation on time, place, friendship and family." *The New York Times Book On* a two-week road trip, Smith reflects on her life, the choices she made or that were made for her, the people she lost, and the memories that remain. *Sunset Magazine*"This is the story of Annick Smith, told through the winding highway of her consciousness." *The Missoulian**Crossing the Plains* succeeds because of Smith's storytelling expertise... [Smith] does a fantastic job of weaving all the elements together so the moments pulled from memory don't distract from the events happening with Bruno beside her. As for Bruno, we should all be so lucky to have such a worthy travel companion accompany us as we go down the road. *Missoula Independent*"Writer and filmmaker Smith traces journeys within journeys as she chronicles a cross-country drive with Bruno, her affectionate chocolate Labrador retriever, from her home in Montana to Chicago, where she grew up, the daughter of Jewish Hungarian immigrants. She is traveling to visit her 97-year-old mother and to take her to the family's Lake Michigan beach house. Smith's trip drums up memories and musings which she shares in a warm, vivid, and evocative narrative as mesmerizing as the two-lane highways she navigates. Stops along the way trigger fascinating looks into the lives of Native Americans, Jewish and women homesteaders, and other western writers. Smith follows the paths of her parents, Helene and Stephen Deutch, who met in Paris, where Smith was born, and came to Chicago, where their artistic pursuits led to close friendships with Nelson Algren and Studs Terkel. While traveling back through her own full and adventurous life, Smith reflects with wit and wisdom on family

and place, the complexities of suffering, and the infinite varieties of joy, including the open road and a good dog's sweet company." Booklist [Annick] holds her life and the choices made by her and for her up to the light cast by her relationships with friends and family. She also tenderly shares the details of some of the losses in her life and examines what happens to hopes when they are fulfilled differently than one might expect and when the person doing the hoping finds herself looking backward to find her way forward. Kirkus Annick Smith's *Crossing the Plains with Bruno* is a rich exploration of place that digs deep into the bedrock of personal and collective memory... As Smith travels across the Plains, she weaves her memories and experience into a vivid portrait of an artist's life as well as a fascinating contemplation of the history and meaning of place and the challenges of aging and death. Montana Quarterly Annick Smith has one of the most graceful and vital relationships with time that I know of. As we see in *Crossing the Plains with Bruno*, she comes by it naturally. Her entire lifelike *Bruno* has been one magical trail. I think that her grace comes from the comfort of her ability to inhabit both the past and the moment with that wonder and vitality. We in the West are lucky to have her, and this lovely, honest book. Rick Bass, author of *All the Land to Hold Us* *Crossing the Plains with Bruno* is proof of Martin Prechtel's belief that the domesticated dog in particular is an ancient master of grief. Also of joy. I knew Bruno, and I always felt when I'd see him barreling around Annick's place up the Blackfoot that the doctor was in the house. How great to find him gleefully panting and stealing our food once more as the grande dame of Montana letters resurrects a life's worth of peaks and valleys, grieves and praises our lost and living heroes, shares her emblematic personal history, and, in beneficent, lifelong, living color, herself embodies the wild beauty and endearingly offbeat culture of her tenaciously loved best place. David James Duncan, author of *The Brothers K* My interest in Annick Smith's life was handsomely rewarded by this tender and perceptive book. A great woman, a great dog, and a road trip in the American West. How can you miss? Thomas McGuane, author of *Crow Fair* In Annick Smith's cross-country ramble with Bruno, we travel from Potomac, Montana, to Paris, from Sawyer, Michigan, to Transylvania as western, eastern European, and family history unravels in her road-weary mind. A delightful road log and reverie, fascinating, funny, and poignant. Gretel Ehrlich, author of *Islands, Universe, Home* Annick Smith writes with such deep intelligence, poetic sensibility, and generosity of spirit that I was entranced by her journey through loss and desire, hurt and hope, to the heart of what matters most: human connection, love of the land, and, through it all, the companionship of the dogs who grace our lives. Kim Barnes, author of *XYZ* "Annick Smith has written the best kind of memoir, alive with observation, reflection, humor, and the lifelong swirl of love and loss. Oh, and there's a dog. Many dogs. I can't wait to give this book to my family and friends. Beverly Lowry, author of *Crossed Over: A Murder, a Memoir* Annick Smith is an archetype for me, modeling a life that seems as full of breadth and breath as one can be. In this rich and grounded book I am honored to travel with her across the American plains and across time, through generations and movements, into the interior of the soul and the heart of the world. Smith's net is wide as she seeks, gathers, collects, and then makes sense of what she finds. I come to understand from her that freedom is illusory. *Crossing the Plains with Bruno* is a wise and wonderful book. Janisse Ray, author of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*