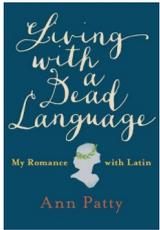


Living with a Dead Language



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They say that you really learn about a people only when you learn their language. Multiply that for a culture long gone, say, that of the Romans.

This book by a former editor describes her love for Latin-- how she went back to college to study it after thirty-five years in New York City publishing. I can't believe I even picked it up after all my complaints about being forced to take Latin in high school. But the fact that I continued studying the language after the mandatory first two years tells you something.

But this is a book about much more than Latin. It's about following one's passion. Along the way, Ann Patty reveals much about her life. She describes sharing a home with a man entirely opposite herself. Her partner, an arborist, lives for the outdoor life. He hikes and skis, even on the coldest days. She's definitely a city person even though she now lives in upstate New York, often rushing back to the city for cultural events.

Amo, amas, amat. OK, those three words strike a bell, but much of the other vocabulary words I once knew have flown from my memory. But I still enjoy hearing her process of learning and especially her excitement. On the second day of class at Vassar where she audited Latin (she also studied at Bard), she arrived two hours early.

Patty also shares how it felt to be the only older person learning something new with much younger people. She was decades older than her professors also.

She began studying because she was bored. That and the image of her mother playing solitaire and drinking in the afternoons terrified her. Plus, her mom wanted her to study Latin in college, but stubbornly Patty clung to French.

More than the language I enjoyed learning facts about Roman society. For instance the Romans passed a law when a man and woman lived together for a year with only three nights apart, the woman became his legal wife--meaning she had the same rights as the man's daughter. Women also were forbidden from tearing their faces and scratching their cheeks when mourning their dead.

Patty also discusses volunteering for an innovative after-school program where she taught Latin to disadvantaged teens. She also introduces the reader to the contemporary world of "Living Latin"--conferences, workshops, and meetings where Roman food was served and only Latin spoken. And they even spent time exploring Rome. All in Latin, of course.

One fascinating course that Patty took was epigraphy, the study of inscriptions on surviving monuments. These were found on everything from roads, buildings, graves, pots, and ceremonial monuments. Her favorite was a monument in honor of a Roman woman, a very rare thing.

Summer's the time for traveling, exploring. This interesting book will take you away from yourself and the world's problems for a while, and encourage you to learn something new.

Posted by Dory L. on July 11, 2016

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