



Patagonian Road: A Year Alone Through Latin America

Kate McCahill

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"When I began my journey, I anticipated danger at every turn," writes Kate McCahill, whose rugged solo trip, mostly by bus, took her through ten Latin American countries.

When she started out, following Paul Theroux's 1979 route in his travelogue *The Old Patagonian Express*, McCahill knew very little about Latin America, and even less about the privileges she took for granted as a white, twenty-first-century American woman. "How naïve I was as I fumbled through Latin America; how stupid I was at times, and how lucky," she writes, noting that she had vastly underestimated the power of the road to both challenge and heal. She found her ties to home, even to her lover whom she'd left behind, loosening the farther she traveled. She became greedy for "the constant shift, the mystery every new place holds, the plunge again into anonymity."

McCahill writes as much about the inner changes wrought by travel as she does about the landscapes and people of the places she visited. Bypassing most tourist spots, her eyes were opened to the privilege she had known and to events of which she'd been unaware; everyday people told the shocking truth about the effects of US intervention in Central and South America, of disapproved-of governments toppled, of fear, of loved ones "disappeared"; she met fellow travelers who were often more exotic than the locals, and she saw poverty that stopped her breath. But she also found welcome, beauty, the joy of discovering kindred spirits among strangers, and how travel, with its disorienting newness, makes every moment an opportunity for transformation.

This is poetic writing, spare and deep, that unashamedly plumbs the depths of the solitary heart as it is pried open to learn that "it is in feasting on the unknown that we come to know ourselves."

KRISTINE MORRIS (March/April 2017)

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