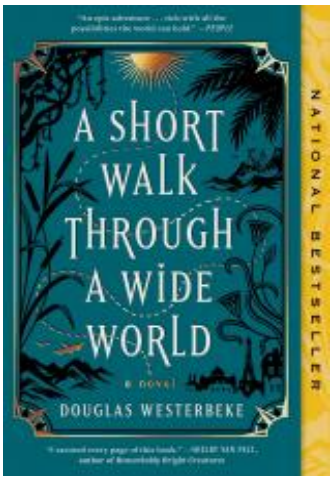
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A Short Walk Through a Wide World

by Douglas Westerbeke



About the Book

THE INVISIBLE LIFE OF ADDIE LaRUE meets LIFE OF PI in this dazzlingly epic debut that charts the incredible, adventurous life of one woman as she journeys the globe trying to outrun a mysterious curse that will destroy her if she stops moving.

Paris, 1885: Aubry Tourvel, a spoiled and stubborn nine-year-old girl, comes across a wooden puzzle ball on her walk home from school. She tosses it over the fence, only to find it in her backpack that evening. Days later, at the family dinner table, she starts to bleed to death.

When medical treatment only makes her worse, she flees to the outskirts of the city, where she realizes that it is this very act of movement that keeps her alive. So begins her lifelong journey on the run from her condition, which won?t allow her to stay anywhere for longer than a few days nor return to a place where she?s already been.

From the scorched dunes of the Calashino Sand Sea to the snow-packed peaks of the Himalayas; from a bottomless well in a Parisian courtyard, to the shelves of an infinite underground library, we follow Aubry as she learns what it takes to survive and, ultimately, to truly live. But the longer Aubry wanders and the more desperate she is to share her life with others, the clearer it becomes that the world she travels through may not be quite the same as everyone else?s.

Fiercely independent and hopeful, yet full of longing, Aubry Tourvel is an unforgettable character fighting her way through a world of wonders to find a place she can call home. A spellbinding and inspiring story about discovering meaning in a life that seems otherwise impossible, A SHORT WALK THOUGH A WIDE WORLD reminds us that it?s not the destination, but rather the journey --- no matter how long it lasts --- that makes us who we are.

Discussion Guide

1. Brainstorm some adjectives you would use to describe Aubry. What traits make her especially able to survive? Compare her to other characters in the book, like Marta, the Prince, Qalima and Lionel. Is there a character who resonates strongly with you?

2. The natural world is a core piece of A SHORT WALK THROUGH A WIDE WORLD. What were some of your favorite descriptive lines evoking the landscapes Aubry traverses? How would the feel of the novel change if a majority of the plot took place on the streets of major cities?

3. From the spider on the boathouse ?reaching out into its little universe? (page 70) to Pathik?s eagle, animals animate Aubry?s travels. Can you point to any instances where an animal might be a metaphor for something Aubry confronts, or even for Aubry herself?

4. Think back to the many slivers of Aubry?s life Douglas Westerbeke offers --- like lying on a beach with Yuki (page 142), dancing with the Navajo (page 246), or paddling by the crabs on Christmas Island (page 260). Out of these small departures, which one would you have liked to learn more about?

5. In the first ?Brief Aside,? Aubry meets an old Chilean man who dislikes travel --- a welcome change from the usual reaction to her illness (page 74). What do you think of the man?s argument? What are your own personal opinions about travel?

6. Can you think of certain passages where Aubry?s gender seemed especially salient? What plot points might change if Westerbeke decided to write A SHORT WALK THROUGH A WIDE WORLD with a male protagonist?

7. How does the nonlinear structure of A SHORT WALK THROUGH A WIDE WORLD affect your reading? What would happen to your experience of the book if Westerbeke decided to write the story of Aubry?s life purely chronologically?

8. On the riverboat with the Holcombes, Aubry tells Somerset that she has replaced the shaft and point of her spear several times. ?Is it the same spear?? she asks him. ?It looks the same. But I don?t know. Is it the same spear? You tell me? (page 58). How does this moment relate to the ?core of consciousness? motif to which Aubry returns (page 195)?

9. In your opinion, which character most significantly impacts Aubry? This can be in an emotional, narrative or philosophical context.

10. Aubry?s sickness rips her from her parents and sisters as a nine-year-old girl and forces her to spend decades with no lasting relationships. The last page of the novel suggests that Aubry has finally found a home with Vincente and his band of lost children. What is the role of childhood and family in A SHORT WALK THROUGH A WIDE WORLD? How do these concepts motivate Aubry?

11. How does Aubry?s approach to life evolve over the course of the novel? What do her illness and the puzzle ball ultimately represent?

Author Bio

Douglas Westerbeke was a librarian at one of the largest libraries in the US. He has spent the last decade on the local panel of the International Dublin Literary Award, which inspired him to write his own book. He lives in Ohio.

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