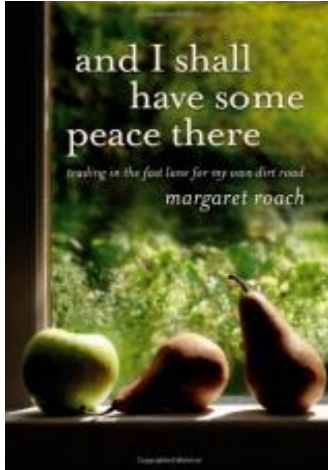


# And I Shall Have Some Peace Here: Trading in the Fast Lane for My Own Dirt Road

by Margaret Roach



## About the Book

Margaret Roach worked at Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia for 15 years, serving as Editorial Director for the last six. She first made her name in gardening, writing a classic gardening book among other things. She now has a hugely popular gardening blog, "A Way to Garden." But despite the financial and professional rewards of her job, Margaret felt unfulfilled. So she moved to her weekend house upstate in an effort to lead a more authentic life by connecting with her garden and with nature. The memoir she wrote about this journey is funny, quirky, humble --- and uplifting --- an **Eat, Pray, Love** without the travel-and allows readers to live out the fantasy of quitting the rat race and getting away from it all.

## Discussion Guide

1. Early on, Margaret describes how "Friends and colleagues warned that I would become depressed, isolated, perhaps worse?" (2). Having heard Margaret's experience, do you think there was there any truth in their warnings? How would you react if someone you knew was going to embark on the journey that Margaret took?
2. Margaret wrote down a list of "Tolerances" and hung it up on the wall. Do you keep track of aspects of your life that you don't like but tolerate in the interest of achieving something else? What would happen if you removed these things from your life? What happened to Margaret and her tolerances?
3. Despite her knowledge about them and her belief that they may be messengers, Margaret's fear of snakes comes up again and again. How does her fear limit her? How does it force her to grow, if at all? Have you ever felt restricted by a fear?
4. Neighbors Herb and Flora provide Margaret with guidance, companionship, and knowledge. At times it seems that

Margaret would have run into real problems without Herb's help. Compare this to the isolation that she felt living in the city. How have strangers assisted, changed, or perhaps befriended you?

5. Margaret writes a comprehensive winter checklist, but still she cannot account for the limitations and curveballs of the weather. How do you strike a balance between what you can control and what you cannot? Do any elements of your experience go back and forth between the two categories?

6. The joy that Margaret's natural, unstructured sleep brings is palpable, and the fact that it ties in with her new life as her own boss only heightens her sense of peace: "There is nowhere to be but here" (197). Do you often have an entire day ruined by a bad night's sleep? Conversely, does job-related stress frequently affect your sleep? What kind of sleep schedule would you fall into if you weren't constrained by the schedule of your job or other responsibilities?

## **IDENTITY**

1. Margaret responded to friends' concerns by pointing out, "I was never depressed in my old life; I was just strangely and terribly lonely, isolated despite being surrounded by six hundred colleagues?" (2). Whatever your geographical and work situations might be, can you relate to this feeling of strange loneliness among others? If so, how do you deal with it? If not, why do you think you've never had this experience?

2. Margaret often discusses how she feels defined by her former email address, mroach@marthastewart.com. How do you think that one's career or online presence function to identify who that person is? What kind of signifiers do you use to describe yourself?

3. Margaret's story emphasizes that travel is not necessary for transformation; it can happen right in your own backyard. Do you take time to meditate and reflect in your own home? Where do you feel you are able to feel most clear and centered?

4. "I am not a cat person," Margaret asserts several times. However, over the course of her time in the country, Margaret and Jack create a respectful --- if somewhat unusual --- bond. What happened to the non-cat person resolve that allowed wild Jack and city girl Margaret to meet in the middle?

5. After a while in the country, Margaret realizes that her attention to appearances is changing. How do clothing and jewelry help you feel ready for certain situations or allow you to blend in? What kind of rituals do you have regarding your appearance, and how would you feel if that rhythm were interrupted?

6. "Proud of my independence, I am also limited by it?" (75). Margaret doesn't just need others for social or informational reasons; the physical reality of being alone leads her to depend on others for some tasks.

7. Margaret describes how she started out early as her family's "Confronter," one who couldn't stand silently by when something struck her as wrong. She was also a girl who played alone a lot of the time. These qualities clearly remained with Margaret years later, when she found the courage to walk away from a life that looked right but felt all wrong and find a new existence in solitude. What kinds of habits and personality traits have you had since childhood, and how have they affected your adult life?

**8.** After some time in the quiet and solitude of her home, Margaret is able to tell the time by the sunlight and the sound of Herb's passing truck. Do you ever find that you're attuned with the time? Can you imagine your current life with no clocks?

**9.** Margaret is very interested in diapause (144-5), insects' practice of shutting down to avoid unfavorable conditions in the environment. Margaret is a clear proponent of taking the time to pull out of the world and taking time to self-reflect when needed. When is the last time you had a moment that could be described as a sort of 'diapause,' or even a period of real solitude, and did it help you understand and deal with anything you may have been going through at the time?

**10.** Blogging helps Margaret to cope with the anxiety of waiting for updates on Herb's operations (and also led to the writing of her book!); she wants to 'put down my story of me' (204). Do you take time to write down your experiences and thoughts, whether on a blog, in a journal, or in letters to friends? How does capturing things in words help you to process what's happening? If you don't keep any kind of written records, in what ways do you organize and examine the world around you?

**11.** 'Even in physical solitude, there can be community of the spirit' (209). In what ways do you find companionship with friends, strangers, and nature, even when you're all alone? How important is it to you to stay in touch with friends, keep up with popular culture and the internet, and spend time in the natural world?

**12.** Margaret describes her new life in the little house as a Wunderkammer, or Cabinet of Curiosities. Do you relate to this image of identity? If so, what sorts of things would you want on display in the cabinet that represents you? If not, what other representations of identity do you relate to?

## **CREATIVITY**

**1.** Margaret recognizes her 'powerlessness and near ignorance of all things country' (30), yet later she says, 'I garden because I cannot help myself' (43). Are these two statements as contradictory as they first appear? How does Margaret reconcile the concepts of complete gardening abandon and country ignorance? How does her process of learning the latter affect the former?

**2.** 'The garden is where there's no pretending that living things don't die' (44). What in particular about gardening brings out the patience and meditation that Margaret searches for? If not gardening, what other sorts of activities do you engage in to find that 'perfect union' (44) that Margaret finds in nature?

**3.** Lists pop up all over the book: meditations, self-improvement items, fears. Do you use lists to tackle the less tangible areas of your life? Does organizing them in this way help Margaret? Do your lists help you?

**4.** Throughout the book, Margaret shares poems, song lyrics, and quotes from spiritual guides that inspire her. What writers, artists, philosophers, and other creators do you turn to for creative and spiritual guidance?

## **Author Bio**

Margaret Roach has been a columnist at the *New York Times*, fashion editor at *Newsday*, the first garden editor for *Martha Stewart Living* magazine, and the editorial director of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. In 2008 Roach left New York City for her home upstate, where she is a consultant and avid gardener, keeping fans up to date on her blogs ?A Way to Garden? and ?The Sister Project.? Roach is the author of **A Way to Garden**, named Best Garden Book of the Year by the Garden Writers' Association of America, and **Groundcovers**, part of the Burpee American Gardening Series, and co-authored **The Natural Habitat Garden**.

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