OUTRUN
AMY LIPPTROT


Amy Lipptrot is not your average nature writer. I never saw myself as, and resist becoming, the wholesome ‘outdoorsy’ type’, she firmly states at the end of this compulsive and at times electrifying memoir.

And yet at the age of 30 she found herself returning to her father’s farm on Orkney, the very place from which she had fled as a teenager, having shunned island life in favour of big city glamour. It was the latter, however, which was her downfall: in London, Lipptrot’s hedonistic existence spiralled into full-scale alcoholism.

In The Outrun (the title refers to a rough pasture) Lipptrot documents not just her experience of rehab, but also her daily struggle to overcome her craving for drink.

She explores the roots of her addiction and comes to realise that island life can offer its own intoxications - wild swimming in freezing water, marvelling at the Northern Lights.

Yet this isn’t a contrived exercise in getting ‘back to nature’. Lipptrot revels in modern technology and argues that it can in fact bring us closer to the natural world, citing as examples the Facebook alerts notifying her of orca sightings, or the Sky Map app that allows her to identify the constellations above her head.

Courageous and clear-sighted, this is a memorable debut.

Stephanie Cross

WEBSITE
www.precise.co.uk

Which book begins...

‘It was the day my grandmother exploded’

Answer on page 81.

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WILDES WOMEN;
How Oscar Wilde Was Shaped By The Women He Knew By Eleanor
Fitzgeralds (Gerald Duckworth & Co. £20; offer price, £17.75)

Hailed as a gay icon and a genius wit, it is less well known that throughout his life Oscar Wilde was very popular with women. This is the first book to explore his friendships with actresses and society hostesses, whose literaryinclinations provided him with publicity and material for his work. Luxury-loving Wilde hated hunting, shooting and clubs; preferring gossip, clothes, champagne and sensuality. But Fitzgeralds’s book presents a less decadent and superficial Wilde: a devoted husband and father alongside his complex and parallel gay life. He inherited his literary gifts from his bohemian, outspoken mother, Lady ‘Speranza’ Jane Wilde. Her belief that a wife should overlook her husband’s ‘indiscretions’, particularly if he was ‘a genius’, helps explain Wilde’s later behaviour and choice of wife (Constance Lloyd, a feminist who remained ‘hugely supportive’ of him). A defender of gender equality, Wilde collaborated with many influential women, including socialite Lillie Langtry and actress Sarah Bernhardt, for whom he wrote Salome. Even if you think you know all about Wilde, this highly entertaining book, packed with fascinating detail and anecdotes, will still surprise you.

Rebecca Walkerseiser

DARK MATTER AND THE DINOSAURS:
The Outr...
of these bodies are very large indeed.
Under the gravitational pull of the galaxy, on occasion they can hit the Earth's surface, causing widespread destruction and leading to the extinction of whole species, such as dinosaurs. In a whistle-stop tour of modern physics, Randall attempts to link the extinction of the dinosaurs to the latest thinking on the source of the greatest mass in the universe – dark matter. An ambitious undertaking that contains a few minor mistakes, but is still a fascinating read and as convincing as the arguments for dark matter itself.

Stephen Coulson

NEW YEAR, HAPPIER YOU
Have the January blues hit yet? New Year resolutions already faltering? Our in-house agony aunt, Patricia Marie, picks two of the best and most uplifting new books for self-improvement.

A MINDFULNESS GUIDE FOR THE FRAZZLED by
Ruby Wax (Penguin Life, £14.99; offer price, £13.49)

The comedienne, writer and mental-health campaigner shows us how to achieve calm in a hectic world. Drawing on her own experience of depression and a Masters degree in Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy, she offers an easy-to-follow, six-week course. Wax describes mindfulness as the most effective tool available for understanding yourself and others. Her passion and dedication to mental health are evident in every page. With advice for relationships parents, children and teenagers, this gem of a read will point you towards a more contented way of life.

DETOX YOUR EGO by Steven Sylvester
(Headline, £12.99; offer price, £10.99)

Psychologist Steven Sylvester’s inspiring book offers a unique approach to achieving your goals. He shares seven easy steps that will increase your understanding of your ego – the ‘natural defence system’ that is activated when you feel anxiety or fear – to help transform yourself. If you’re willing to enter a personal metamorphosis in the way you think, feel and act, I would encourage you to pick up this book. Although uncomfortable and challenging at times, it will motivate you to be the best that you can be. A perfect New Year’s catalyst to help you be freer, happier and more successful.

ALSO ON THE SHELF

THE LITTLE RED CHAIRS
by Edna O’Brien (Faber & Faber, £18.99; offer price, £16)

Vlad, a stranger from Eastern Europe, masquerades as a healer in the Irish village of Cloonola and has the locals under his spell – until he is unmasked as a war criminal.
A compelling tale of war, exploited naivety, charisma and fatal attraction.

Lyndsy Spence