

## **‘Eat, Pray, Love’ at the library this summer**

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Wow. If you ever happen to write for a newspaper and want to find out whether anyone reads your column, just have your colleague’s excellent piece — in this case, on Richard Florida’s “Who’s Your City” — mistakenly go to press under your byline. For those of you who worried: no, I’m not contemplating retirement yet; and no, my husband and I have no plans to sell the family farm.

“Who’s Your City” is about the places we choose to live and about how, as never before, we have considerable opportunity to think strategically about this life decision which Florida argues “has an equal, if not greater, effect on our economic future, happiness, and overall life outcome” than our choice of occupation or life partner. And — we have ample occasion in our lives today to change our minds, to try someplace new if we choose.

Even if, like me, you’ve lived in the same place and practised the same craft for next to forever, it’s an extremely worthwhile exercise to think through, now and again, what it is that keeps you in your particular corner of the world. Especially as you grow older, you want to be sure that you’re spending your time in a place you want to be, doing things you want to do, with people you adore.

In the world of books, there are many ways to explore this theme. My personal preference is memoir, and a good one is my favorite summertime reading. I love to lose — and find — myself in the stories and musings of (usually) women who have struck off for a new place, taken a gap year, or redesigned their lives. I find that one does not have to share their exact experience to identify deeply with their quest for inner fulfilment.

“Eat, Pray, Love,” by Elizabeth Gilbert, is only the current darling in a long line of introspective women’s writing set in appealing locales. There are many I can recommend: Jean Anderson’s “A Year By The Sea and A Walk On The Beach,” set on Cape Cod; Jane Christmas’s “The Pelee Project: One Woman’s Escape From Urban Madness,” on Lake Erie’s largest island; Marlena De Blasi’s “A Thousand Days In Venice”; Barbara Kingsolver’s “Animal, Vegetable, Miracle,” in rural Virginia; and, of course, Frances Mayes’ “Under The Tuscan Sun” and its sequels.

“Eat, Pray, Love” garnered a lot of publicity when its author was interviewed by Oprah Winfrey last fall. It had been front and centre in every bookstore and high on bestseller

lists for months. Holds queues were long at the library. And I was dancing the waltz of the skeptic. Yeah, yeah, yeah. 30-something woman. Crisis of the soul. Travels to exotic places. Spiritual awakening. New man. Happily ever after. The fairytale archetype, reworked for the 21st century woman.

I finally gave in when my own 20-something daughter read it and told me I should reconsider. She was right. It is a wonderful book. And Gilbert writes really well. Her premise is not new, but her approach is profoundly innovative. The book's format is easy and comfortable, yet deeply symbolic and, because of that, instantly engaging. By page three, I was hooked.

Gilbert's narrative is, by turns, meditative and hilarious. It is also brutally honest. She does not cut herself any slack or grant herself any sympathetic excuses. There is not one moment of smugness or self-satisfaction about the truths that dawn on her as her odyssey unfolds. You feel like Bridget Jones' American cousin has lent you her diary. And you find yourself thinking about the power of place in your life in a complementary, but completely different way than you do in Richard Florida's practical, scorecard approach.

That's high praise from a skeptic. In fact, my conversion has been so complete that it's going to be the first book we discuss when the library's afternoon book club reconvenes in October.

You may wonder at my mentioning precious little about the actual content of this book. That's intentional. I'll only quote its subtitle: *One Woman's Search For Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia*. For more than that, I want you to read it for yourself.