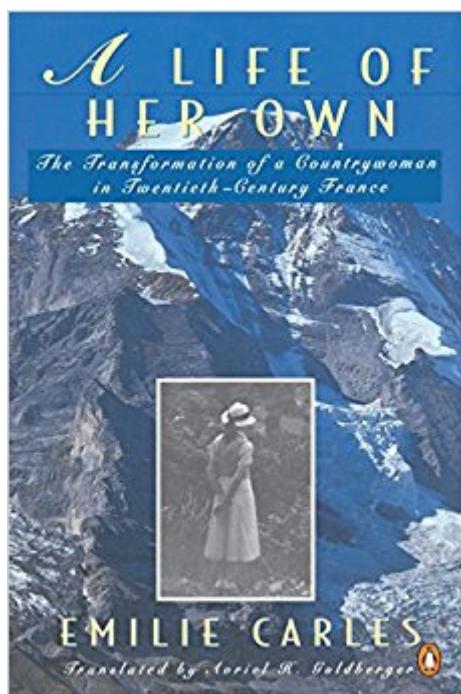


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A Life Of Her Own: The Transformation Of A Countrywoman In 20th-Century France



Synopsis

First published in France in 1977, this autobiography vivifies the captivating Carles from her peasant origins in a tiny Alpine village through her work as a teacher, farmer, mother, feminist and political activist.

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Customer Reviews

First published in France in 1977, this autobiography vivifies the captivating Carles from her peasant origins in a tiny Alpine village through her work as a teacher, farmer, mother, feminist and political activist. Photos. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Emilie Carles started out her life the same as many of her neighbors in her predominantly peasant town in France. Unlike her neighbors, she went on to receive an education and break out of generations of grinding poverty and ignorance. The very fact that she is able to chronicle her most unusual life is a testament to the power of the human spirit. Everyone interested in issues of class and gender influencing biography should read this excellent memoir.

I am not a big biography reader but this book was very good. I found myself not wanting to put it down. Excellent read.

This was a quick read (I finished it during a plane ride across the Pacific). Carles was born in 1900 in a peasant hamlet in one of the poorest regions of Alpine France. Rare for her time and place, she

gained literacy and was successful enough in her studies to gain a teacher's license. She wrote her stories into notebooks for decades and, when the time came, began fashioning their contents into an autobiography. As sickness overtook her, she opted to tell her tale to a publisher, who worked the tapes and her books into this story. It's worth reading. I've read bits and pieces of the history of isolated, medieval Alpine communities, mostly in books on mountain-climbing; this is a glimpse into the end days of such a community, with its harsh lifestyle, old traditions, and superstitions of its inhabitants. Carles was a woman who challenged many of those traditions and superstitions as she grew and learned. Toward its end the book bogs down into political statements. Carles married a remarkably free-thinking man for the late 1920s/early 1930s, and his views meshed nicely with hers--pacifism honed by the loss of her brothers to the trenches of World War I and a socialist bent that wants to see the state offer real aid to poor communities like hers. I could have done without her (unrealistic in my opinion) stirring proclamations on the need for a four-hour work day and a return to a simple rural lifestyle. But this doesn't take away from the value of the book on the whole. It's an entertaining look at a strong woman who saw the twentieth century pass in a place that rarely gets written about.

This is one of the best autobiographies I have ever read. Mme. Carles has so much to say about her way of life and her countrymen. Her relationship with her family is described touchingly and well. Her peasant background reminds me of my grandparents' farming lives in the southern U.S. As I read, it seemed strange to me that someone who depended on owning and working land could become a leftist. However, in view of Mrs. Carles' descriptions of the various governments which have ruled France, I can see how someone could be desperate (and naive) enough to turn to anti-capitalism. It helped me understand the political climate in Europe better, but that is not why I recommend the book. It is simply a lovely description of how peasants lived and thought for many centuries. It has a sense of timelessness, of life before the frantic changes technology has brought over the last hundred years. Just take a large grain of salt when you read Carles' economic recommendations.

I thought that this book was so great! I read it for graduate French History and it was the best supplemental piece thus far in my series on French history. I suggest reading *A Tale of Two Cities* before this book. If you appreciate the beauty of France's countryside and want to understand the difficulties and individuality of a very strong French woman, do read this book.

This is one woman's story of life in an age and place which has disappeared over the course of a century. The voice is powerful, although the translation from the French could have been better. Carles truly makes you feel what it was like to be a young peasant woman. This isn't sentimental trash or dry history. It's a very down to earth tale of "this is what it was like for me."

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