



About Alice

Calvin Trillin

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In Calvin Trillin's antic tales of family life, she was portrayed as the wife who had "a weird predilection for limiting our family to three meals a day" and the mother who thought that if you didn't go to every performance of your child's school play, "the county would come and take the child." Now, five years after her death, her husband offers this loving portrait of Alice Trillin off the page, an educator who was equally at home teaching at a university or a drug treatment center, a gifted writer, a stunningly beautiful and thoroughly engaged woman who, in the words of a friend, "managed to navigate the tricky waters between living a life you could be proud of and still delighting in the many things there are to take pleasure in."

Though it deals with devastating loss, *About Alice* is also a love story, chronicling a romance that began at a Manhattan party when Calvin Trillin desperately tried to impress a young woman who "seemed to glow."

You have never again been as funny as you were that night, Alice would say, twenty or thirty years later.

You mean I peaked in December of 1963?

I'm afraid so.

But he never quit trying to impress her. In his writing, she was sometimes his subject and always his muse. The dedication of the first book he published after her death read, "I wrote this for Alice. Actually, I wrote everything for Alice."

In that spirit, Calvin Trillin has, with *About Alice*, created a gift to the wife he adored and to his readers.

About Alice Details

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From Reader Review About Alice for online ebook

Christine Myres says

I love Calvin Trillin. End of story.

Diane says

This is a marvelous little book. It's a love letter to Trillin's wife, Alice, who died of heart failure in 2001.

It's filled with funny and touching anecdotes about their life together. My favorite moment is when Alice was convinced she lost her looks because she couldn't get out of a speeding ticket. Trillin tries to convince her that it's really because there's been an influx of gay police officers. "Of course we're all in favor of that," Trillin said, "but it's bound to change the equation."

And Alice smiled.

emily says

I'd heard of this when it came out, but it seemed far, far too sad to even think about. But then tonight I got home from work, went down to the laundry room to throw in some laundry, and noticed someone had left a new stash of books on the communal shelf and this was among them.

By the rinse cycle, I was weeping in the doorway of my building's laundry room. I came up to my apartment to finish the whole thing, and my clothes are still in the dryer right now. (Yes. This is a short book.)

"About Alice" is a perfect little monument. Every moment is incredibly full of love -- Mr. Trillin's for Alice, primarily, and theirs for their children. The key, though, is the absolute feeling that, were the situation reversed, she'd have written the same book for him.

And what more could anyone ask for?

Shirley says

The lumpy throat started on page 6 (of this very short book, which is article length) when Calvin Trillin was recalling how he got a lot of letters from his readers about Alice, although they had never met her, but knew her only through his writing - like the letter from a young woman who "sometimes looked at her boyfriend and thought, 'But will he love me like Calvin loves Alice?'"

Lisa says

Overall this was a very satisfying piece. I really like how the author elaborated on how Alice the person differed from Alice the character he had written about - the quote about dietician shoes was excellent. At the same time, I would have preferred that there had been less focus on her physical appearance, but it sounds like she was conscientious about it, so that's probably how she would have wanted it. In reflecting on the book, I'm surprised the author didn't speak more to the feeling of loss, but instead really focused on describing Alice - but that's the title I suppose!

I listened to this as an audiobook on 2x speed, and it was about half an hour - shorter than many podcast episodes, and certainly better than most episodes as well.

Steph says

This is an ode written by a man who lost his one true love to cancer. Calvin claimed that he wrote everything for Alice, and you can tell he meant that. The love he felt for her really jumped off the pages, and broke your heart at the end. It was truly a touching read.

Steve says

Every once in a while we're reminded that bad things can happen to good people. The good people in this case are Calvin, the writer, and his dearly departed wife, Alice. As you might expect from a loving tribute, pedestals and pathos are intrinsic. The earnest Trillin, smitten to the core, did his best to make her real, but still may have crossed into too-good-to-be-true territory. In a way, I had hoped for as much. Devotion suits him. Other things I'd read made him seem like such a pleasant fellow: humorous without trying too hard (in contrast to, say, Dave Barry), ironic without seeming smug (unlike many post-modern types), and self-deprecating without being disingenuous (unlike me, for instance (I say with what I hope is the right kind of irony)). In a piece like this, he had to veer a few degrees away from his usual drollery and light touch. He still came across as a mensch, but a sadder one given his loss.

To hear him tell it, Alice was too good for him. She was smart, attractive, classy, and kind. He mentioned how when he first met her at a party, at the apex of his own charm and wit, she seemed to him to glow. In the scant seventy some pages that followed, he shared a handful of stories about their family life together. They were, to use the most precise word I can think of, nice – simple and spare with no hint of pretense or deeper understanding. I just wish there were more. Come to think of it, that's what Trillin himself would have wanted.

Cheryl says

"We are so lucky."

This is a heartwarming paean of love and gratitude to his wife, who had died five years earlier.

It's not sad or depressing, it is an uplifting and inspirational celebration of her as wife, mother, and very much as her own wonderful self.

Count your blessings and enjoy everything, I think that's the message.

YoSafBridg says

About Alice is Calvin Trillin's beautiful, loving tribute to his late wife, Alice. After over forty years together he still speaks of her with that true-love light in his voice, as if she could have done no wrong~and those things she did do which differed from him, which perhaps annoyed him, which perhaps they argued about were just those darling little eccentricities that endeared her to him ever the more.

I don't recall reading any of Trillin's New Yorker pieces before though i'm sure i must have; i do know i haven't read any of his other books. I picked this one up after hearing him on the Diane Rehm Show, and aside from sounding somewhat familiar it sounded very appealing.

Many of my serious relationships have ended just as those lust/infatuation chemicals/hormones are beginning to die out and other feelings of true love, or friendship, or whatever are supposed to be kicking in (or so i've been told). I used to fear that friendship stage, now i can sympathize/commiserate with the girl who wrote to Trillin "that she sometimes looked at her boyfriend and thought 'But will he love me like Calvin loves Alice?'"

Or maybe that's all just a bit too mushy/ooggy for me~i do love the sturm und drang just a touch.

Still and all, this is a lovely, quick read~i might just pick up a few more of his books.

Julie says

Okay, I am going to admit I was 30 minutes into this book before I realized it wasn't "Still Alice." I kept waiting for her Alzheimer's diagnosis. In spite of that I thoroughly enjoyed his tribute to his late wife, who sounds like a woman I'd like.

Negin says

Since I was unfamiliar with the author and his wife, this book did not resonate with me at all. It's possible that those who are familiar with the author's writings may enjoy it. Not me. At first, I liked how much he missed and loved his wife. As the book progressed, I didn't particularly care for the name dropping and the perfect life – perfect wife, perfect daughters, everyone's beautiful, Ivy League, you get the idea. I'm sure that there are people like that. In fact, I've met a few, but it's not exactly what I wanted to read about. I felt that this memoir didn't have much depth.

cathy says

When *About Alice* first appeared as an essay in *The New Yorker* last year, I remember missing my train stop

because I was so engrossed by Trillin's eulogy and love letter to his late wife. Trillin opens his heart and home to readers as he chronicles his relationship with Alice from their first chance meeting at a party, to their final good-bye when cancer claimed her life after a 20-year remission. Trillin has written about Alice in other books (which I have not read), and he admits that those portrayals may not have been altogether accurate, much to Alice's amusement. In memoriam, he decides to come clean about the well-heeled woman who inspired his life and much of his work. He still paints scenes of their marriage with a broad-humored brushstroke, but Trillin is careful not to edit the ebbs and flows of their relationship, including his wife's battle and public crusade against lung cancer.

The book is both sad and celebratory: you feel this widower's loss deeply, yet he provides hope for all readers that a relationship such as theirs—one of interdependence of minds and hearts—is very possible, and not simply the stuff of fiction or something from a bygone era. For most of the book, Trillin portrays himself as a schlub who lucked out by winning over the whip-smart and always poised Alice. He claims his writing was a means to continually impress her, yet you get the sense that he needn't have tried so hard: Alice didn't commit to anything she didn't feel strongly about.

Jessica says

I haven't read much of Trillin's previous work, so I'm sure this book didn't have the same effect on me that it would have on someone who has come to know Alice through Calvin's words. Trillin was so charming when I heard him on The Diane Rehm Show, though, that I just had to read this book, a 77-page reflection written after the death of his wife. I picked up the book and read it in one sitting, on the floor of the psychology section at Borders. Don't be fooled, though; the beauty of this book is in its brevity. Trillin's love for his wife shines through and yet it never feels as though he's trying to convince you of it.

Nomi says

A delicious offering to his late wife and their life together, I tried hard to finish Calvin Trillin's book in a single reading and managed to space it out over three days.

It is a compact tome, with chapters representing themes that repeated throughout some 36 years of marriage. There is not one wasted word. As has been my experience with other books by Trillin, his humor made me smile, sometimes through tears. In this entry, it extends to their friends, including Trillin's account of Nora Ephron's contribution to Alice Trillin's memorial service. First diagnosed with cancer when their daughters were 4 and 7, Alice lived 25 more years, with flair. The richness of her life is lovingly celebrated in this book.

Ross says

What I learned from this book? If you are walking down the street and, against all odds, just happened to get hit on the head with a flower pot, you need to get the flower pot off your head and keep walking.

This is a charming book that I just heard in audio form--read by the author. That is a special treat, I think, for this tribute. Trillin is so funny and loving about his late wife, who I certainly did not know. But I wish I had.

Leigh says

This book was critically acclaimed, and I read it on the recommendations of magazine and newspaper reviewers.

I didn't think it lived up to the acclaim.

The book is a postscript to the author's other writings about his beloved wife, Alice, who passed away last year. Calvin had written about Alice for years; indeed, the vast majority of his work apparently centered around his deep-felt love for this woman.

Only I've never read any of his other writings.

So while this little book was a sweet tribute, and Alice seemed like a neat lady that I would've greatly enjoyed knowing... I don't know. It wasn't magical for me. I didn't really have the back-story.

Terzah says

Everyone has to define for themselves what it means to live a successful life. If my husband feels the mix of admiration, love and deep sadness when I die that Calvin Trillin reveals feeling on the death of his wife Alice, I will have succeeded in life in one big important way. The love, admiration and sadness are not because he was blind to her quirks or because they never disagreed or because she was always right. That makes this little memoir even better. May we all, as one friend said of her, learn how to "navigate the tricky waters between living a life you could be proud of and still delighting in the many things there are to take pleasure in." (Side note: I read this little book in one sitting on my lunch break at work. Just goes to show that profundity doesn't always require lots of words.)

LJ says

The "Alice" in question in the memoir, *About Alice* is Alice Trillin, wife and muse of Calvin Trillin, the author of this book. I had never read anything that this famous New Yorker author had written so I was unfamiliar with this woman who is such an important character in some of his other books about his family life. Yes, she was a real-life woman who had a life, raised two girls, was an English professor and the author is heart-broken at her death of cancer in mid-life. It is a terrible tragedy. Cancer always sucks. The problem with this memoir is that I did not get much of a sense of Alice Trillin as a fully developed character. The author portrayed her firmly poised on a pedestal and then told anecdotes that really weren't all that flattering. She seemed to actually appear shallow, which I am quite sure was just the opposite of his intention.

The book is only 78 pages long. It's long enough to convey how absolutely bereft the author is at the loss of his beloved wife. It may also be long enough for those that are familiar with this writer and his previous books chronicling their family life, but I did not get all the details I needed for the whole story, and I wanted the whole story. I think that he may have written this book too soon and in his grief, was unable to write too much about it. It's totally understandable, but I was disappointed. He goes into quite a lot of detail about how

beautiful she was and what I wanted to hear about was the deeper stuff. For those readers that are familiar with this author and have followed along with his other books it would be enough, but I was left with a lot of holes I could not fill.

Al says

I read this when it was published in the New Yorker. It is an amazing remembrance of Alice, Calvin Trillin's wife and muse, who died of heart failure in New York City on September 11, 2001. When I saw the book on amazon.com, it said it was expanded. So I'll have to re-read it to see what else he's added.

I've only saved two editions of The New Yorker since I started reading it over 20 years ago. The first was the first post 9/11 edition with the black-on-black Art Spiegelman cover, and the other was the edition from the spring of 2006 that has this story in it.

After finishing this book, there are a couple light chapters toward the end that were probably edited from The New Yorker piece for clarity (at least I didn't remember them in The New Yorker, so I assume that they are new). They illuminate the woman more than the writer, and aren't as pitch perfect as the rest of the book. Still, I am richer for having read them.

lia says

So Calvin Trillin has been writing stories for the New Yorker for years. I like him in the New Yorker-white guy-smart-funny-older & thus from a simpler era kind of way. He often wrote very lovingly and sweetly and funnily about his wife Alice.

This is a tiny book, around seventy pages or so, talking about Alice, her diagnosis of lung cancer in the seventies and her heart failure in the nineties from the radiation she had received to kill her cancer. It sounds like a downer I guess, and it is almost unbearably touching and sad in parts, but it is also funny and uplifting and smart.

He loved her so unabashedly, and said so in his writing, so that when she died, he received many letters from women he didn't know who said things like "I hope I find someone who loves me as much as you loved Alice" and perhaps that is what is so bittersweet about this book and their lives together...because, of course, I want that too.
