

BOOK CLUB NEWS

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My Life on the Road, by Gloria Steinem

Discussion Leader: Moira Johannessen



There was excitement in the air in anticipation of discussing this revealing book about one of the icons of the Feminist Movement. With much pertinent biographical information already contained in the book, Moira focused on many thoughtful questions. What is the role of travel in Gloria Steinem's life and accomplishments? What is the difference between a traveler and a tourist? Explain the nature of the questions Gloria asked during her travels. How has she changed by traveling? Are you as comfortable with travel as she is? Is the talking circle a good way to solve problems? Explain the importance of listening, particularly its power and its influence on empowerment. Are you familiar with the techniques of active listening? Gloria Steinem's favorite place is a bookstore; what is yours? (My favorite place is a library, although the internet is slowly replacing it - a conversation for another time?). Gloria never drove or had a driver's license; how did she use that as an advantage?

The Iroquois Confederacy, the oldest participatory democracy in history practiced for over 800 years, inspired Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson while setting up our representative democracy. Gloria spent much time with members of the Indian Nation. What was Gloria's influence in the talking circles with Native American people and women in particular; how did these circles influence Gloria? How has Gloria Steinem changed as she aged? How did she reconcile travel with a stable home? Do women have equality? Very often in a memoir what is not talked about is significant. What did she not talk about in *My Life on the Road*? Is Gloria a good writer? Were her stories well-developed? Was there humor?

During the go-around, readers overwhelmingly enjoyed the read with few exceptions. Readers found the book fragmented, lacking coherence, with many stories not well developed. That said, she seems to be an eternal optimist, a "hope-aholic." It is interesting that she was afraid of public speaking. Readers appreciated her sense of wonder and curiosity. Not only is she a genuine heroine, she is relatable as well. Her work for and with women is amazing; she is a waterfall of energy. Readers enjoyed how she connected her childhood with her life on the road. They were impressed how she grew up in poverty yet went to Smith and managed her lifestyle. Some readers would like to learn more about her childhood and education. Many marveled that she was an equal-opportunity listener. Some readers enjoyed the casual, unassuming style of her writing. Others who listened to the audiobook read by Debra Winger were struck by her dead-pan style that mimicked Gloria's style of writing. One reader shared

that although she wasn't a feminist at the time, she benefitted from what Gloria Steinem and the people around her accomplished for her, the reader, personally. It expanded her view.

Thank you, Moira, for guided us through the journey of a true American icon, and thank you for the cookie treats. I hope you had some leftovers. Join us next month when we will discuss *My Antonia*, by Willa Cather led by Leslie Gardiner.

