



Live Alone and Like It

Marjorie Hillis , Lisa Hilton (Preface) , Cipé Pineles (Illustrator) , Frank Crowninshield (Introduction)

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"Whether you view your one-woman ménage as Doom or Adventure, you need a plan, if you are going to make the best of it."

Marjorie Hillis provides no-nonsense advice in this archly funny, gently prescriptive manifesto for single women. Though it was 1936 when the Vogue editor first shared her wisdom with her fellow singletons, the tome has been passed lovingly through the generations, and is even more apt today than when it was first published. Hillis, a true bon vivant, was sick and tired of hearing single women carping about their living arrangements and lonely lives; this book is her invaluable wake-up call for single women to take control and enjoy their circumstances.

Hillis takes readers through the fundamentals of living alone, including the importance of creating a hospitable environment at home, cultivating hobbies that keep her there ("for no woman can accept an invitation every night without coming to grief"), the question of whether single ladies may entertain men at home (the answer may surprise you!), and many more. Who can resist a book with chapters such as "A Lady and Her Liquor," "Pleasures of a Single Bed," and "Solitary Refinement?" A priceless gem from a more genteel age.

Live Alone and Like It Details

Date : Published April 1st 2005 by Virago UK (first published 1936)

ISBN : 9781844081257

Author : Marjorie Hillis , Lisa Hilton (Preface) , Cipé Pineles (Illustrator) , Frank Crowninshield (Introduction)

Format : Hardcover 154 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Self Help, Feminism, History, How To, Humor, Womens

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From Reader Review Live Alone and Like It for online ebook

Jess says

This book was adorable. Pertinent, no nonsense advice to the single lady, as appropriate--for the most part--today as in 1936. The bits about your lady's maid were the only evidence of dating. On the whole, uplifting but also sensible advice for living alone--and exactly what this single girl needed to hear.

Elena says

Creo que la mejor forma de acercarse a este libro es primero y ante todo teniendo en cuenta la época en la que se escribió: los años 30. Hay muchas cosas en él que hoy día quedan completamente desfasadas, pero eso no impide que se disfrute por lo que es. Es un manual de consejos bastante divertido, irónico y con un mensaje muy positivo sobre lo que implica para una mujer el hecho de vivir sola.

La estructura ha sido lo que más me ha fallado, me ha resultado demasiado esquemática, los capítulos demasiado temáticos. Me habría gustado ver todos los temas que trata integrados y mezclados entre sí, creo que habría hecho el ritmo de lectura más ameno.

Alisha says

This vintage guidebook was written in 1936 for a rather new category of woman: she who is single, working, and self-sufficient.

It's enlightening to look at it within its social context: after the first world war, there was a lot of anxiety about the sudden imbalance between the male and female population. So many men had been killed in the war that many women would never have the chance to marry. Hence, the genesis of the "extra women," a phrase that I find wistful and sad. No one should feel like they are an unneeded surplus number. Of course, this book does a lot to encourage single women to enjoy their lives and not feel sorry for themselves.

Interestingly, republished copies of this book drop that phrase from the title and simply mention the "single woman."

Even though some parts of this book are heavily dated and others funny in an unintended way, I did enjoy the straight talk about how to not be pitiful, how to take control of your own social life and home atmosphere, and how to be a pleasant sort of person.

The funny bits were the parts where I learned that there are FOUR types of pajamas, and TWO of them are suitable for entertaining guests, or the parts that assume that you have access to a maid at least some of the time. Running a home and playing hostess *have* changed a bit since 1936! Though, to be fair, she was writing to people of a certain social class. I know that not everyone at that time had a maid.

Here are some tidbits I enjoyed for various reasons:

"Everybody feels sorry for herself (to say nothing of himself) now and then. But anyone who pities herself for more than a month on end is a weak sister and likely to become a public nuisance besides."

"You've got to have variety...Every woman should have a smattering of knowledge about practically everything...to listen well you must have at least a vague idea of what the other fellow is talking about...it is both boring and irritating for him to have to adapt his conversation so that you can understand it."

"Practically no one's morale can overcome an outfit that's all wrong."

"As we have already suggested, one of the great secrets of living alone successfully is not to live alone too constantly. A reasonably large circle of friends and enemies whom you can see when you want to, and will often see when you don't want to, is an important asset."

"You probably spend plenty of breakfasts, luncheons, evenings, Sundays, and holidays entertaining yourself. Are you really entertained? Anyone with any gumption can be. The first rule is to have several passionate interests...You should have at least one that keeps you busy at home and another that takes you out."

"Even if your aim is merely to reach an average as an amusing person, you'll need to keep at it...a few discriminating moments spent on the morning paper, a few varied and well-chosen magazines read thoroughly, at least one good book a week, and a reasonable amount of "getting around" should do the trick."

"The civilized place for any woman to have breakfast is in bed...Perhaps you stand on your feet all day in a none too impressive job--be an elegant lady of leisure just the same from, say, seven-forty-five to eight-fifteen. Even though nobody knows, you'll be more of a person the rest of the day." :)

Shannon says

This book is the platonic ideal of 1930's society lady sass. I learned that there are four types of pajamas, and two of these are suitable for entertaining. That alone garners it five stars.

HeavyReader says

I got this book to review for the Feminist Review blog. I have mixed feelings about this book, and don't know what rating to give it. I wish I could give it two and a half stars, but since I can't, I will give it the benefit of the doubt and give it three stars.

I will post the full review once I write it.

Here's the complete review from
<http://feministreview.blogspot.com/20...>

Potential readers should know two things about this book. First, the author was an editor for *Vogue*. Second, it was a bestseller in 1936. Those two facts should hint at for whom it was written and warn that much of it is outdated.

This book's mixed messages caused me to have mixed feelings about it while reading. On the one hand, it empowers women by telling them they can live alone and not only survive, but also thrive. On the other hand, it implies time and again that any woman living alone is only waiting for something better (a man) to come along.

The most interesting part of this manual is its historical perspective on single women. It is evidence that women did live on their own – even in 1936. Conservative propaganda would have us believe that prior to the tumultuous 1960s, all women were either married, living with relatives, or boarding in some sort of respectable dormitory. This book proves that women were on the road to liberation long before the women’s movement of the 1970s.

Less positive is the class assumption the author makes about “live-aloners” (as single women living by themselves became known after the publication of this book). For example, live-aloners apparently want, need, and are able to afford a maid (sometimes a “colored” maid), at least on occasion. There is no mention of who does the cleaning and serving at the maid’s house if she should happen to live alone. In any case, this maid business shows the target audience is women aspiring to or firmly entrenched in the upper classes.

Equally problematic are assertions made about men, especially regarding money. “There are still a few chivalrous gentlemen who believe that the man should be the provider,” the author states on page 101, and “the men guests always pay” for taxis to and from the theater, even when the single woman does the inviting, she says on page 46. Such ideas may have been prevalent sixty years ago, but hardly seem productive or true in the twenty-first century.

Sure, some of the advice given in this book is helpful: Don’t feel sorry for yourself. Make your home pleasant and comfortable. Have several passionate interests. Friends are important. Live within your means. Save some money. However, this advice seems helpful to most human being, whether female or male, single or married, living alone or with other people.

Practical and specific guidance for women wanting to learn how to be content living alone would have been more useful. Truly helpful topics might include securing doors and windows against intruders, repairing clogged plumbing, negotiating with a landlord, and recognizing symptoms that indicate it’s time to see the doctor. Instead, the reader is advised to invite people over who live in worse places than she does, told how many negligees and bed-jackets a woman living alone should own (two and four, respectively), and counseled that a woman who is too sick “to fix yourself up” is “better off in a small hospital ward” than home alone. This advice is useless to most contemporary women who live solo.

I don’t understand why this book was reprinted. Most of the advice beyond basics that apply to nearly everyone seems impractical and obsolete. I can only suggest this book to people who want to have a good laugh and then contemplate how far women who live by themselves have come.

Tereza Nekorancová says

Naprosto geniální a s osv?žujícíím nadhledem psaná knížka, u které se ?lov?k zasm?je, ale i zamyslí. Lehké, sv?ží, ?tivé, elegantní jednohubka, doporu?uju:-)

Jane says

When I saw that pairing of publisher and title, my first thought was that this was probably an interesting but worthy tract from the late sixties or early seventies, somewhere around the time that Virago was first born!

Wrong!

This book was written for an earlier generation, back in the 1930s.

It is witty, warm and wise; and its new incarnation, as a little hardback book with a cute pink cover, feels wonderfully right.

It would slip easily into a handbag, and it would be a lovely gift for the right person.

I think that the thing I loved most about this book was the voice.

Imagine a friend who you think is a little bossy, but you know is usually right; and who you are sure has your best interests at heart and will do her level best to help you get up and get back on the right path when life has knocked you sideways. That's what you have here. Not someone who will do it for you, but someone who will give you the confidence to do it yourself, and who will be the very best kind of cheerleader.

Now when this friend came to write her book, she had the wisdom to know that some are single by choice and that some are not at all happy to be single, and that a lady might be beginning a solo life when young, middle-aged or elderly, and that it might be forever or just for a little while.

Her advice is sound; and now I'm going to paraphrase a little:

- * You must enjoy arranging your home and your life just as you like!
- * You should know when you need to call on your friends!
- * You can pursue your interests and enjoy your leisure!
- * You would be wise to think about the etiquette for a single lady in social situations!
- * You really can live your life exactly as you want, follow whatever interest you want!

She understands that the single lady needs to know that there are lots of tasty meals she can rustle up for herself, that a single bed really is something to be appreciated, that there are lots of way to entertain guests, and that there are some very effective ways of getting rid of a gentleman caller who lingers for too long.

Her text is peppered with lovely little black and white drawings, and her advices is interspersed with accounts of a wonderful array of single women. Some of them have got things wrong, but the majority have got things right and demonstrate that there so many different ways you can be solo and successful.

There's little about the duller kind of practicalities. Jobs that need doing round the house, living within your means, finding tradespeople, that kind of thing. This is a book about having style, about having confidence, about living your life to the full!

It's a period piece, but so much of what it says still holds good, and the only thing that feels out of date is the assumption that you will have a maid.

The voice still speaks clearly, and though I know that one was a real Vogue editor and the other was fictional, I couldn't help wondering if the author of this book and the Provincial Lady had ever met.

Well, they were contemporaries, and I'm sure each would have been wonderfully entertained by the other!

Bloodorange says

Można z tej książki wyuskać kilka ciekawych patentów na walkę z poczuciem osamotnienia, kilka dokumentalnych detali o życiu w dużych amerykańskich miastach w latach 30., kilka porad na temat podejmowania gości i kilka uwag o tym, jak sprawić, by byłeś interesujący dla innych ludzi, ale trzeba pamiętać, że jest to głównie dokument.

Garść cytatów:

„Powinnaś mieć przynajmniej jedno hobby, które cię zatrzyma w domu, i jedno, które cię z niego wyciągnie.”

„Przyjaciele bardzo wysoko błądzą sobie cenę takie hobby jak astrologia, numerologia, chiromancja, grafologia, wróżenie z kart i tak dalej. Jeśli jesteś w którejś z tych dziedzin specjalistką, to pamiętaj, że gdy podczas seansu poświęcisz drugiej osobie całą swoją uwagę, to będzie ona tobą zafascynowana... Pamiętaj jednak, że takie hobby będzie znacznie ciekawsze dla twych przyjaciół niż dla ciebie.”

„...kobieta, która próbuje zaimponować wymyślnymi koktajlami, jest jeszcze gorsza niż ta, która dodaje sódki pianki do sałatki.”

"Old-fashioned: Przeznacz jedną szklankę na osobę. Wrzuć do każdej szklanki kostkę cukru, dodaj parę kropli angostury, odrobinę wody i rozgnieć cukier. Dorzuć plasterki pomarańczy, cytryny, pasek świeżego ananasa i wisienki koktajlowe. Dodaj miarkę whisky łytniej i napełnij szklanki lodem. Do każdej szklanki dodaj pałeczkę do koktajli, i niech goście się dobrze bawią." - *swój popularność old-fashioned zawdzięcza między innymi temu, że był drinkiem do spokojnego popijania nawet przez całe wieczory, więc mimo wielu skądinąd by opcje dosyć ekonomiczne dla gospodarzy.*

"Oczywiście cywilizowanym miejscem, w którym kobieta winna zjeść śniadanie, jest ówko (...) Trik polega na tym, żeby wypracować sobie system, dzięki któremu stanie przed tobą, na kolorowej tacy, szklanka – duża i ładna, nie jakaś tam zwyczajna – pełna schłodzonego soku pomarańczowego, kubek dobrej parującej kawy i gorzka grzanka przyrządzona tak jak lubisz, z odrobiną marmolady albo miodu."

Suvi says

If someone had told me a few months ago what book I was going to read today, I would have laughed myself to death. This is so far from my taste in books it's unreal. Generally speaking I of course get a lot of fun out of those old-fashioned etiquette rules and advice for women (thanks Retronaut for the many laughs), but reading an actual book on those topics wouldn't have crossed my mind. However, when I stumbled across Hillis's book a while back, it just looked so cute and endearing, that I had to add it on my to read -list. I also understood that it's apparently not a guide book on how to snatch a good husband and therefore getting rid of the ugly single-status, which apparently was a huge problem back then.

There's a couple of main thoughts that Hillis repeats every once in a while: money does not equal good taste, you don't need a big pay check to organize your life into a nice one, and it's ok to pamper yourself even though there's no one to see your lace nightgown. The advice are gentle but firm, but Hillis emphasizes, that in the end everyone does what they think is best. You can ignore all her advice, but if you sit alone in your apartment all day long, don't complain that you're bored and without friends. The book also takes on account that living alone may not have been your choice, for example if you've gotten divorced. Hillis says that the intention of her book is to encourage women to embrace their situation, but not to defend living alone as the

best option. You get to do what you want when you want, but you still don't have to suffer loneliness if you just take the bull by the horns, and go out the door with an open mind.

There are only a few things that reveal the publishing year, like mentions on etiquette and clothing. *A Lady and Her Liquor* -chapter was fun. Apparently Martini, Manhattan, and (familiar for *Mad Men* -fans) Old-fashioned were the drinks that everyone should have known how to make. There was some of the conception that women should dress elegantly, which doesn't really apply today. However, Hillis's advice are mostly quite general, so a modern woman can still get at least something out of them without having to be a career woman in 1930s New York.

I smiled, when I noticed two things that apply to my life quite well: the apartment doesn't have to be messy, even though outsiders aren't there to see it everyday; you can eat well even if you're alone and feel like eating convenience foods in the kitchen straight from the boxes. No huge revelations, but still a fun and light read.

Melissa says

sounds like a self-help book, and in a way, I suppose it is. But it's so much more. . .

I found this book quite by accident--on a bargain shelf at an indy store in Asheville. I was travelling with a friend and we decided it was too fun to pass up. We spent the next few days reading bits and pieces of it to each other and were soon referring to Marjorie regularly. For instance, I was debating about buying a dress, and Adrienne insisted that Marjorie would demand that I buy it. So I bought it.

At any rate, I finished it this week. First published in 1936, it certainly smacks of a social history time capsule. And yet. . .

Marjorie is all about figuring out ways to make yourself happy. She believes that we shouldn't rely on others for that happiness, but on ourselves. And unlike some "being single" books that have been forced into my hands by well meaning friends, this one doesn't talk about being single like it's a bad thing. She has wit and humor and charm, and I just love Marjorie. It's one of those books that I want to share with everyone, but there's no way in h*?* I'm going to let my copy out of my house.

Taryl says

It's my new bible.

Asma says

Returned the book to the library, unfinished :D

This book was so old fashion, and from the 60 pages I read, I felt it was full of repetitions.

I guess the main idea was that people won't feel sorry/bad for you if you're living alone, and YOU are the one who has to go the extra mile to mingle with people so you wouldn't get bored. So obvious, I think!

Elizabeth says

"Think of all the things that you, alone, don't have to do. You don't have to turn out your light when you

want to read, because somebody else wants to sleep. You don't have to have the light on when you want to sleep, because somebody else wants to read. You don't have to...lie awake listening to snores, or be vivacious when you're tired, or cheerful when you're blue, or sympathetic when you're bored. You probably have your bathroom all go yourself too, which is unquestionably one of Life's Great Blessings...From dusk until dawn, you can do exactly as you please, which, after all, is a pretty good allotment in this world where a lot of conforming is expected of everyone."

Mel (Coposdepapel) says

Ha sido una lectura muy agradable, divertida e inspiradora.

Es un libro que en muchas ocasiones nos resalta que, ante todo, debemos cuidarnos para nosotras mismas y no hay excusas que valgan.

Ah, por último, hay que tener en cuenta en qué época se escribió este libro antes de criticarlo, que me veo venir los comentarios xD

Aneesa says

I couldn't resist picking up a first edition of this book for far too much at that charming new shop at 21st and Valencia where people were two-stepping in the back and everything (including this book) was covered in sawdust. But I am not an "extra woman" living alone on \$100 a month (yes, this book does include actual sample budgets from the year 1936!), so I bought it.

It is really an historical document, and made me think things were actually pretty far along in 1936 (at least in New York, although the author implies that there are single women in mid-sized cities across the country). Some of the advice is typical for its time (develop interests in order to be interesting), some before its time ("You will be able to eat what, when, and where you please, even dinner served on a tray on the living-room couch--one of the higher forms of enjoyment which the masculine mind had not yet learned to appreciate" [this, mind you, is before TV]), and most highly amusing. Ms. Hillis generously recommends the pleasures of eating, talking on the phone, and entertaining in bed. The chapter on "A Lady and Her Liquor" is the longest, most practical, and probably the most funny, but unfortunately out of date (no mention of vodka). The chapter on "Will You or Won't You?" the most unuseful, especially its advice that whichever you choose, you shouldn't tell anyone.

A word of warning: this book would make an amusing gift for the girl who just got out of a bad relationship, but I wouldn't recommend it for your long-single friend.

(P.S. The last two pages of my copy were uncut!)
