



Straight on Till Morning: A Biography of Beryl Markham

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Drawing on her personal relationship with Markham and interviews with many of her contemporaries, Lovell recounts Markham's tempestuous private life--a life filled with unabated romance and adventure lived out over three continents. 50 photographs.

Straight on Till Morning: A Biography of Beryl Markham Details

Date : Published September 1st 1987 by St Martins Pr (first published 1983)

ISBN : 9780312010966

Author : Mary S. Lovell

Format : Hardcover 408 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Cultural, Africa, History, Biography Memoir, Aviation, Autobiography, Memoir

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From Reader Review Straight on Till Morning: A Biography of Beryl Markham for online ebook

Susan Stuber says

This is a very well-researched, well-written biography, but you have to be extremely interested in Markham to read all of the letters, telegrams, etc. But after reading "Circling the Sun" and "West with the Wind," I felt compelled to read this book, which gives you the whole story in detail, and I am glad I did. If anything, it added to the Markham mystic.

Jim says

This is truly a fair-minded piece of work by an author who travelled extensively and took the trouble to meet the woman she intended to write about. Beryl Markham was truly a complicated woman, and not always (maybe not ever) a pleasant one. I was so impressed by the book allegedly written by Markham, *West with the Night*, that I sought this biography out immediately. I'm glad I did; Ms Lovell has a gift for presenting the entire subject, warts and all, to the reader without telling you what conclusion you should be coming to...that's for you to decide.

Beryl Markham was allowed an unthinkable degree of independence at an early age. At the age of 10 she was allowed to undertake a three day trip on horseback to a neighbouring farm to attend a party, accompanied by a couple of African retainers. She was encouraged to fend for herself by a doting father, whom she idolised to the extent that no subsequent man could measure up to him....and there were many men. She had her ups and downs (and in-and-outs): the peaks were high and the valleys were almost as low as you could sink. She was a person who used and discarded other people seemingly without remorse, with "never look back" as a motto. She was not above living with friends for a while and stealing from them on departure, and running up credit in friends' names at the store. She certainly didn't mind borrowing your husband or cuckolding her own. And if a couple of male writers were to write her book for her in exchange for the use of what God gave her, I imagine she would be good with that. Seemingly, not a nice woman. In fact, Hemingway described her as a "high-grade bitch".

Still, there are some things you can't take away from Beryl Markham. She genuinely had guts. She survived a plane crash, a motorcycle accident, being mauled by a lion, stomped and bitten by stallions, tied up and beaten by home invaders, and being fired on at a roadblock during a military coup (the soldiers were preventing her from attending her club so she charged the roadblock in her Mercedes...she drove the riddled Mercedes to the club and entered bleeding from a bullet wound to the chin.) She obtained a horse trainer's license at the age of 18 and trained derby winners into her 80's. And she was the first woman to fly the Atlantic East to West. And let's not forget the book...if she actually wrote it....it was a crackerjack of a memoir!

Ms Lovell has done a great job with this biography, and has gone to the trouble of providing photos of many of the principals. I recommend it to anyone who is interested in reading about a strong and fascinating woman who lived by her own rules.

CD says

A speculation dense biography. Lots of details discussed that are inferences or third or more party gossip.

Yet, these rumors are apparently the only possible explanation about parts of Beryl Clutterbuck(etal)'s life.

The known, documented parts of her life are fascinating and more than worth the time for a biographer to have written as extensively as this author did. That she, the author was able to spend time with this legend adds even more meat to the story.

The writing wanders at places or is vague, due to the previously mentioned problems. However, it does not suffer too much as a result. Variation in detail is one of the flaws in this work. More details about some of the documented parts of her life might be in order and less speculative inferences about others would have made this a best seller.

Very recommended flaws and all as this is the best third party work that details Beryl Markham's life primarily. Stories from the biographies of other figures such as D. Finch-Hatton add little more than grist and curiosity which lead back to this work.

Markham's own book is a necessary companion for the reader to 'hear' more of Beryl's internal approach to life.

Kate Lawrence says

In preparing to write this biography, Lovell had the rare opportunity to spend time with Markham in Africa a few months before the latter's death in 1986. Here we find out the background and the continuation to the adventures recounted in Markham's memoir *West with the Night*, and have most questions satisfyingly answered. We find out that her mother hated Africa and moved back to England, leaving a very young Beryl to grow up in Africa with her father. Markham was married three times, had many lovers, including a son of the British king, lived in the U.S. for some years after her historic transatlantic flight before eventually returning to Kenya. Here there are plenty of anecdotes about her days as a horse trainer, and her close friendships with Karen and Bror Blixen, Denys Finch Hatton and Tom Black.

Perhaps most interestingly, Lovell points out discrepancies in several places between Markham's account in *West with the Night* and what really happened. For example, Markham recounts a high-profile horse race between two horses she had trained. The dramatic close finish obscures the fact that these two horses never actually raced against each other in that particular race; Markham was not above rearranging the facts in her memoir, as in her life, to serve her own purposes.

I've now read five biographies by Mary S. Lovell and not been disappointed. She chooses people who are fascinating to begin with, then researches and carefully documents their lives while keeping the reader wonderfully entertained.

Doug Dams says

This is the biography of Beryl Markham. She was a remarkable woman raised in British East Africa. She learned to train race horses from her father, learned to track game and hunt from the Nandi warriors she grew

up with and she learned to fly and was a bush pilot in Africa. She became internationally famous when she became the first person to fly from England to North America (against the winds). It's a fascinating life and you have to wonder why her story has become lost. She knew Isak Dineson and appears briefly in Dineson's book "Out Of Africa", but isn't really given credit by Dineson for her achievements. It's a well written book about a really fascinating woman. Beryl Markham died in 1986.

Robert says

Beryl Markham was a familiar name, as she had been a neighbour to my grandparents, but I didn't really know that much about her and had really never read about her. Now I wish I'd met her when she was still around. What a remarkable mould breaking person she was. The book was extremely well researched and written. It was hard to put it down. I am now left with an appetite to read more about Beryl and more books by the same author.

Suzy says

This is my year of Beryl Markham, instigated by reading *West with the Night*, Beryl's memoir about growing up in British East Africa (now Kenya) and her solo east to west transatlantic flight in 1936. I loved the thrilling way that Markham told us of her life and adventures, even knowing what she was telling us was not exactly factual, but more written in the best storytelling tradition.

I really enjoyed this biography which give the fuller, more factual picture of her life. Even without Beryl's embellishments, her life of adventure was fascinating. A woman full of contradictions - she was fiercely independent, but always needed someone to lend their support. She was the life of the party, but liked animals, especially her horses, more than people. She had many careers; the two that stand out the most are her time flying and training/racing horses, something she learned from her father and that she did right up to just a couple of years before her death at age 84. She lived life fully, but had no sense of the business of life, which led her to destitution and poverty more than once in her life. She was the quintessential Phoenix.

I might give this 5 stars, but Lovell was hell-bent on proving that Markham actually wrote *West with the Night*. Her authorship has been called into question over the years - some believe it was her 3rd husband that wrote the book. But I believe Lovell given her extensive research and interviews, not only with the many people who knew and worked with Beryl, but with Beryl herself. I just thought Lovell spent too many pages belaboring the point about authorship.

Next up - *Circling the Sun*. I wish the PBS/BBC documentary from 1986 *World without Walls* were more readily available. That would put the icing on the cake!

Steven Hull says

When re-released in 1983, Beryl Markham's *West With The Night* (1942) became an immediate success, perhaps more so than when it was originally released in the long shadow of World War II. Personally, *West With The Night*'s literary eloquence, discussion of early 20th Century British East Africa, and its insight into Markham's own remarkable life made it an attractive read, and after doing so I felt compelled to read Markham's autobiography by Mary S. Lovell. Lovell's treatment of Markham, written almost exclusively at

the end of Markham's life, does not disappoint. Lovell's research was exhaustive and included interviews of many of Markham's contemporaries and of Markham herself.

Beryl Markham was a rare individual, born of well-off parents who were not made for each other. Markham's father, Charles, was a hard working adventurer bent on achieving financial stability through land development and horseracing in Britain's African colonies. He failed in the former and while succeeding in the latter it was never enough to achieve the financial status he sought. Charles raised Beryl in what is today Kenya without his wife, who chose civilization over uncertainty. Beryl grew up comfortable in a man's world, but she never experienced the type of peer relationships that are so important as one grows up. Her formal schooling was limited. Her ability to work as a member of a team was never developed. She was never able to find her niche in the larger society. Consequently, Beryl's single-minded focus on her own needs became her greatest strength as she became a phenomenal racehorse trainer in her own right, a world famous aviator, and an accomplished writer. It also was her undoing through three disastrous marriages, a continuing series of lovers, and a propensity to make one bad business decision after another. Lovell shows why Markham's life was like a shooting star. In her youth she traveled in the highest social circles in England and the United States. In 1936 she became the first aviator to fly from England west to North American non-stop and was feted accordingly. When *West With The Night* came out it was universally acclaimed for its writing and for the life Markham described. But at 40, Markham had reached the apex of her achievements and fame. Her remaining life is best characterized as a continuous slide into permanent economic difficulty, limited success as a horse trainer, and increasingly less contact with the rich and famous. Essentially, Markham became an aging (although still beautiful), poor, spinster with littler to offer.

The re-release of *West With The Night* brought her story to a generation unfamiliar with Markham and a world that would never again support the accomplishments of a lonely, enormously talented, but forever self-isolated genius. None of the negatives, in the end, however, outweighed Markham's accomplishments. Supremely self-confident in her chosen fields of endeavor and blessed with a fearlessness of calculated risk, Markham accomplished the unthinkable and the improbable. As one famously said of another well-known adventurer, 'The likes of her we will never see again'. In Markham's case this is true and Lovell captures why this is so. A ravishing beauty, innately smart, full of herself and afraid of little on this earth, Markham cut a wide social and journalistic swath through her day at a level that is hard for us to imagine today, regardless of how the second half of her life played out.

Eileen Pucci says

I was inspired to read this biography of Beryl Markham after reading Paula McClain's *Circling the Sun*.

Beryl Markham's claim to fame was that she was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean from east to west. She was also a very successful racehorse trainer in Kenya where she was raised and spent most of her life.

Although she never had any money, she always managed to get by and sometimes lived very well by sponging off of friends and lovers.

She was a fascinating character.

The aspect of the book I loved best was the descriptions of Kenya. The Great Rift Valley, Njoro, Lake Naivasha and the Ngong Hills are described as having a beauty unsurpassed on earth. While I have never thought I was interested in visiting Africa, I would dearly love to experience the beauty described in Beryl Markham's biography. I only hope it is still there.

Eric_W says

I loved West With the Night that I read several months ago so I was interested in foraging for the real story behind Beryl Markham's solo flight west across the Atlantic, her childhood in Africa and her relationship with several famous men of the early twentieth century. Beryl's father was a failed (bankrupt) British military officer who fled to British East Africa where he realized the potential for profit in supplying wood to the government, which had embarked on an ambitious railroad-building project. Soon he was a large landowner employing over 1000 Africans. Beryl grew up surrounded by natives; she participated in their customs, learned their language, practiced their survival techniques, and played their games. In fact, their habits became so ingrained that even as an adult she insisted on going everywhere barefoot whenever she could.

She developed several close friendships with native children who taught her tracking skills and jungle lore. She learned to walk in absolute silence, her feet gliding over the leaves of the forest without making so much as a sound lest she be ridiculed by her companions. Friends remarked she still walked in this manner sixty years later, "as though she had wings on her ankles." Surprisingly, she was allowed to participate in hunts. Because she was the European memsahib she could order the natives around. Hunting was primarily a male activity, and had she been African she would not have been allowed to participate.

This was still wild Africa. It teemed with lions and other untamed animals. She remained unafraid and was somewhat of a prankster. While barely twelve years old, she and a friend killed a deadly black mamba snake with some sticks, and then proceeded to parade around holding the snake aloft on the top of their primitive weapons. Beryl's mother soon returned to England (Beryl never forgave her - in her autobiography she never once mentions her.)

Beryl had an extraordinary affinity for horses. She was the first woman ever to be granted a trainer's license in Kenya. Her horses consistently won at the races. In more than one instance she bought and successfully trained reputedly unmanageable horses: in one case even a killer. The natives gave Swahili names to all the Europeans,

and Beryl's name was translated as "she who cannot fall off a horse."

Her marriages were not as successful. She was very headstrong and her promiscuous behavior was difficult for most of the husbands to tolerate. It was even rumored that she was the mother of Prince Henry's child, heir to the British throne. Lovell presents evidence that Beryl could not have been the mother, but the Queen Mother was so concerned about the possibility of scandal (Beryl had already been divorced once and was married to someone else while she was fooling around with Henry) that they bought her off with a lifetime annuity that continued to be paid until Beryl's death in 1986.

She was an excellent pilot; her solo flight west to North America from England was no society dame's lark. Aside from the length of the flight, she made it in a new type of plane, virtually untested, and against strong headwinds. When she successfully survived a crash-landing in a bog in Newfoundland -- itself no small feat, it would have been a perfect landing had one of the wheels not sunk into the muck, causing the plane to nose forward -- the plane had completely dry fuel tanks. She landed only one hundred yards from the edge of the ocean. Interviewed at age eighty-three, she admitted it was probably the only time in her life she was really scared and ever after she hated flying over water.

Chris says

This is a fantastic read! A detailed look at the life & death of a remarkable woman, along with nice backstory on the many people that influenced Markham whether heavily or just slightly. There are things to admire and love about Beryl Markham, as well as many significant flaws including being a master manipulator, promiscuity, & financially inept. A complex character to say the least, one both independent yet always needing someone to affirm her value. The book is crammed full of interview material, logbooks, letters, newspaper articles to bring veracity or to dispute the many rumors and controversy that surrounded Beryl. She was abandoned by her mother at an early age & essentially abandoned by her father when she was just 16 yet her fearlessness, independence, survival instincts & resilience were instrumental in many of her successes. Her abandonment was key to her constant insecurity and search for validation, as well as her lacking any maternal instinct of her own leading to the abandonment of her own child. Her achievements as the first woman (age 19) race horse trainer in British East Africa (*before Kenya was Kenya* as used in *Circling the Sun*), first certified woman pilot in the BEA, and eventually the first woman to fly solo east to west from England to North America in 1937 were absolutely amazing for her time. A must read for anyone truly interested in this bigger than life figure.

Kate says

I read this after finishing Beryl Markham's autobiography "West with the Night". That book was an amazingly lyrical, beautiful memoir. This biography by Mary Lovell fleshes out the details of this remarkable woman's life. Lovell was able to spend time with Beryl Markham for several weeks near the end of her life. She was also granted access to all of Markham's papers, and conducted numerous, in depth interviews with many people from her life, both friends and "enemies." Markham was essentially a beautiful, amoral, driven individual who was able to create a life of amazing adventure and accomplishment by trading on her beauty, charm and naivete. Her friends were committed to her, her enemies hated her, and the lines between the two were often fluid. Her love affairs were numerous and passionate. The book is a fascinating, detailed, engrossing exploration of Markham's entire life: triumphs, tragedies, joys, heartbreaks

Laura says

Like so many others, read this book after becoming aware of Beryl Markham via *Out of Africa* and other books about British East Africa (Kenya). Her autobiographical *West with the Night* is a wonderful story, and *Straight on Till Morning: the Biography of Beryl Markham* fills in a lot of the gaps, both about the historical period, covering most of the twentieth century UK, US, and Africa (British East Africa / Kenya and South Africa), as well as about Beryl's life. Beryl was a top notch racehorse trainer, early aviator (she soloed the first successful westward flight between England and North America), and she moved through life with nary a thought to the mundane details. Love her or hate her, and there were many in both camps, she certainly led an exciting life, and I really enjoyed Mary S. Lovell's take on it, built upon 6 weeks of interviews with Beryl in the summer before her death as well as access to Beryl's papers. Fascinating look at a fascinating woman.

Bettie? says

Description: *Beryl Markham, who died in 1986, was the first person to fly solo from England to America. The full story of her adventures across three continents are revealed in this biography of a lady whose fame as a pioneer flyer and leading racehorse trainer, was only exceeded by her beauty and controversial character.*

4* Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth, 1527-1608

WL *Straight on Till Morning*

Jean says

This is a well written and meticulously researched biography of Beryl Markham. Back in the early 1980s I had read her memoir "West with the Night" and was impressed. The memoir had originally been published in the 1940s. This book provided a lot more information and insight into Beryl. She was a private person and did not disclose much personal information in her memoir. The author stayed neutral throughout the book. Lovell stated the rumors then set about providing documentation proving or disproving the rumors and myths about Beryl. The author spent considerable time interviewing Markham as well as her friends and enemies. Lovell also reviewed letters, documents and newspaper articles while researching for this book. Lovell left the readers to analyze and interpret the data themselves. I particularly liked that aspect of the book. There are lots of photographs throughout the book. The book has excellent appendixes, notes, bibliography and index.

Markham was a complex woman with lots of talent and intellect who was also a selfish and difficult person. The author explored both facets of her life. I highly recommend this book to anyone looking for more information about early women flyers, horse trainers or life in the early colonial days of Kenya.

I read this as a hardback book. It is 408 pages, published in 1987 by St. Martin's Press.
