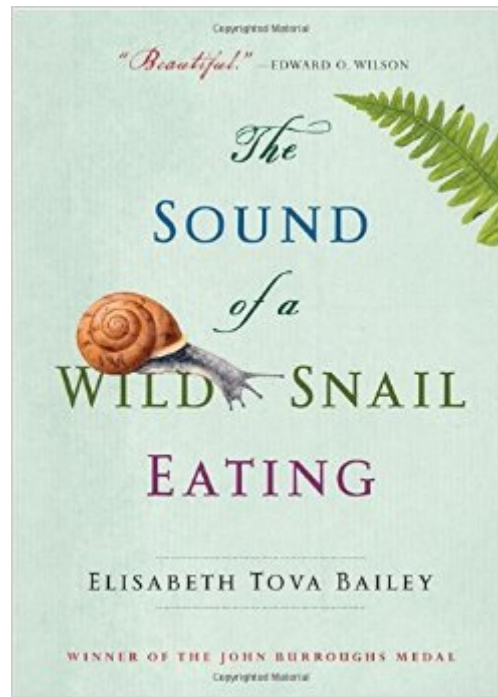


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# The Sound Of A Wild Snail Eating



## Synopsis

In a work that beautifully demonstrates the rewards of closely observing nature, Elisabeth Tova Bailey shares an inspiring and intimate story of her encounter with a *Neohelix albolabris* "a common woodland snail. While an illness keeps her bedridden, Bailey watches a wild snail that has taken up residence on her nightstand. As a result, she discovers the solace and sense of wonder that this mysterious creature brings and comes to a greater understanding of her own place in the world. Intrigued by the snail's molluscan anatomy, cryptic defenses, clear decision making, hydraulic locomotion, and courtship activities, Bailey becomes an astute and amused observer, offering a candid and engaging look into the curious life of this underappreciated small animal. *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* is a remarkable journey of survival and resilience, showing us how a small part of the natural world can illuminate our own human existence, while providing an appreciation of what it means to be fully alive.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...the snail had emerged from its shell into the alien territory of my room, with no clue as to where it was or how it had arrived; the lack of vegetation and the desertylike surroundings must have seemed strange. The snail and I were both living in altered landscapes not of our choosing; I figured we shared a sense of loss and displacement." Elisabeth Tova Bailey was in her mid-thirties when struck with a mysterious illness that soon led to her complete incapacitation. Without knowing the cause, much less the cure or the course that it might take, the disease was a frightening visitor. One day, a

friend stops by with a rather odd gift. A snail, from out in the yard. First placed in a flower pot and eventually a terrarium, the snail becomes Bailey's constant companion. Because of her lack of mobility and energy, much of her time was spent observing the creature. You might think this would be dull, or worse, that you'd be stuck listening to someone bleakly describing their every physical complaint. Not so. This book has very little to do with health issues and far more to do with curiosity and resilience. Bailey is not a complainer, actual details of her health are few and without self-pity. She doesn't simply give up either, she makes clear she wants to fight this unknown assailant on her life. That she does so with the help of a small snail is astounding. The first surprise is that snails have a daily routine. They have certain times to eat and sleep and travel. They often return to the same place to sleep, and they sleep on their side. (!!!) As she watches the daily activities of the snail, she manages to study research on snails in general and in detail. Turns out snail research is pretty deep...volumes have been written on every tiny detail. As in: snails have teeth, 2200+ of them! Seriously, if they were bigger you'd think twice about stepping on one. They also have a special talent for when the going gets tough in their little world: they start a process called estivation. It's not hibernation (they do that too!) but instead it allows them to become dormant when the weather goes bad, or they lose their preferred food source, etc. Some snails have been known to estivate more than a few years. The process of sealing off their little shell is fascinating, and a study in insulation. Then there's the romance. Researchers have studied that too, and I won't go into too much detail, but let's just say lady snails are not complaining about romance in their life! Male snails really knock themselves out on the charm aspect. So much of the research that is out there is fascinating, and Bailey sorts through it and shares the most interesting details. This isn't just a science project for her, she sees parallels in her condition as well as the snail's. Illness took her out of her social circle, and her life seemed slow and inconsequential. And snails usually are a typical example of slow and inconsequential living: "Everything about a snail is cryptic, and it was precisely this air of mystery that first captured my interest. My own life, I realized, was becoming just as cryptic. From the severe onset of my illness and through its innumerable relapses, my place in the world has been documented more by my absence than by my presence. While close friends understood my situation, those who didn't know me well found my disappearance from work and social circles inexplicable....it wasn't that I had truly vanished; I was simply homebound, like a snail pulled into its shell. But being homebound in the human world is a sort of vanishing." What makes this memoir unique, besides her indomitable spirit, is that she doesn't push any sort of religious or spiritual agenda for her positive outlook. There is no implied message, which is often a feature of such an inspiring book. Her facts are based on solid research, and she doesn't waste words; her prose is

clear and precise. Additionally, and this may be trivial, but the book is exceptionally beautiful: little snail insignias, and designs, poetic quotes, and the actual fonts and design layout make it lovely. One word of warning. Some inspirational "illness" stories often end up being the 'go to' gift choice for a sick friend. I know of one gentleman, who, when diagnosed with a serious illness, received eight copies of Tuesdays with Morrie from well-meaning friends. This is not that kind of book. It would be a far better gift for a Type-A personality that needs to slow down in their hectic life, or a book just to savor for yourself. It actually might make a great gift for a young person interested in science (the "romance" portions are tame). In any case, this book made me want to reconsider how much of my hectic life could be slowed down to enjoy the smaller but ultimately relevant details in the natural world around me.

The Sound of Wild Snail Eating is not your typical memoir or inspirational novel. Nor will you expect to hear much talk about finding God in between these pages. Elisabeth Tova Bailey takes us on a brief journey through her life and the mysterious disease that leaves her in a state of paralysis. Not being able to stand or walk or even sit up in bed, you would think that her life was over and yet when she begins observing the life of a small woodland snail, she finds meaning not only in herself but in our own species. I really enjoyed reading this story even though it is based entirely on snail watching. I did not know much about the book before I contacted the publisher and even if you read the synopsis, you would still be surprised by the story in front of you. The Sound of Wild Snail Eating is a truly quirky memoir and Bailey is a very resilient, courageous woman. It was painful reading about how debilitating her mysterious disease left her. Even worse was reading the epilogue and having Bailey describing her numerous diagnoses. I couldn't help but think how I would handle the situation if it were me. However Bailey has the spirit of a lion and she found a renewed sense of purpose from her observations. It was a joy to read about her discoveries with the snail and subsequently her own personal revelations about life. For a book whose tone threaten to be s....l....o....w, I thought that this book was a fast read since most of the chapters are short and the prose is quick and flows nicely with the story. Bailey is very descriptive and rightly so since she's involved in participant observation. There were times when this book felt like a documentary into the life of a snail rather than a memoir. Bailey covered everything from the anatomy of the snail to its eating habits and even their reproductive traits. The reader learns a lot as well for example: "Spiral direction has an impact on relationships; a snail must find a mate of its species with a matching shell." pg 64 Yet you are quickly reminded of Bailey's presence in the novel when she makes comparisons between her present medical condition and the snail. Aside from the therapeutic

qualities that this snail brought to Bailey, I honestly think that her research will prove instrumental in the study of *Neohelix albolaris* or the woodland snail. After reading this book, perhaps you'll come away with a great appreciation for snails or perhaps you'll come away with a great appreciation for life itself. What's guaranteed is that you will come away thinking that this is a great story and Elisabeth Tova Bailey is a courageous woman.

*The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* by Elisabeth Tova Bailey is a healing book. While a woman recovers from a life-threatening condition she has the time and patience to observe one small wild snail. Her thoughts, research, and experiences help her, and us, to heal our damaged relationship with the world of nature. The result of careful and heartfelt observation of even the smallest bit of life can not only enrich a life but also find and give life anew. This book is the perfect gift for anyone recovering from a set-back or in need of inspiration. I love how Elizabeth, while appreciating the small things of life, also brings in haiku. Perfect.

I had absolutely no idea what *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* was about when I picked it up to read. If you had told me it was all about a woman who's stuck in bed staring at a snail, I would have said "no thanks." But after finishing the book, I found myself wishing it was longer. Yes, it's all about snails and their behaviors, but I promise you, after reading this, you'll never look at snails again the same. But really, (at least for me) I'll never look at anything the same again. This book made me realize how little I know about so many things in this universe. How much I have to learn. It took Elisabeth Tova Bailey's illness for her to learn this and now she's teaching all of us. So, yes, this book really is about so much more than snails. And it's pretty short, so if you're unsure about it, it's not a major commitment. But I think that, like me, you'll be wishing it had about 100 more pages. And now I want a pet snail!

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