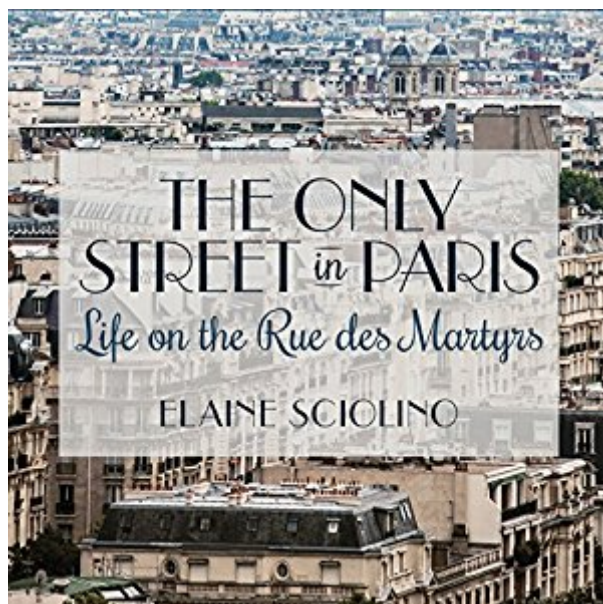


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The Only Street In Paris: Life On The Rue Des Martyrs



Synopsis

Elaine Sciolino, the former Paris bureau chief of The New York Times, invites us on a tour of her favorite Parisian street, offering an homage to street life and the pleasures of Parisian living. While many cities suffer from the leveling effects of globalization, the rue des Martyrs maintains its distinct allure. On this street, the patron saint of France was beheaded and the Jesuits took their first vows. It was here that Edgar Degas and Pierre-Auguste Renoir painted circus acrobats, Emile Zola situated a lesbian dinner club in his novel *Nana*, and François Truffaut filmed scenes from *The 400 Blows*. Sciolino reveals the charms and idiosyncrasies of this street and its longtime residents - the Tunisian greengrocer, the husband-and-wife cheesemongers, the showman who's been running a transvestite cabaret for more than half a century, the owner of a 100-year-old bookstore, the woman who repairs 18th-century mercury barometers - bringing Paris alive in all of its unique majesty. *The Only Street in Paris* will make listeners hungry for Paris, for cheese and wine, and for the kind of street life that is all too quickly disappearing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sometimes it seems as if every American who visits France writes a book about the experience. Even if we limit ourselves to books by those who actually take up residence in Paris or Provence, that's still a lot of books to choose from. Elaine Sciolino's book, *The Only Street in Paris*, has a lot going for it -- Sciolino was the Paris Bureau Chief for The New York Times, she's lived in Paris for over a decade, she and her American husband have raised two American daughters in Paris. She

also wrote a fascinating book about French society called *La Seduction: How the French Play the Game of Life*. In *The Only Street in Paris*, Sciolino limits herself to writing about a single street in the 9th arrondissement. After living in a different Paris neighborhood, Sciolino and her husband downsized and relocated after their daughters left for university. Sciolino knew exactly where she wanted to live -- the Rue des Martyrs, in Pigalle near Montmartre. Sciolino explores the history, the lives past and present, the architecture, the businesses, and the atmosphere of her adopted Rue. You can dip into these short chapters in any order. There's no story here, it isn't like *A Year in Provence* or *Under the Tuscan Sun* in which the author is trying to be accepted in her new neighborhood or to find love or to find herself. Sciolino is, judging by her own telling of the events, not shy at all about getting to know new people, or asking questions or favors, or offering to do favors or indulging in a bit of matchmaking here and there. It's no wonder she's a successful journalist. *The Only Street in Paris* is a pleasant stroll through a well-to-do neighborhood and will undoubtedly increase the already sizable tourist population of the Rue des Martyrs. It's already on my short list for places to live as soon as I win the lottery. (Thanks to Edelweiss and W.W. Norton for a digital review copy.)

Certainly a clever idea for a book. With Paris being examined so extensively, writing about a single street would seem to be a stroke of genius. Somehow, though, for me, the writer couldn't make her stories and encounters "sing." The writing is acceptable, if pedestrian (her background is journalism), but I didn't get a sense of anything magical about this street, just the author's desperate need for it to be so. Frankly, something churlish in me wondered if the shopkeepers dreaded seeing the author heading towards them, knowing they'd be pummeled with questions. The writer seems to gather facts the way children gather Easter eggs - no real interest in the eggs, the "getting" is the thing. She kept drilling one shopkeeper about his humble, difficult background and continued prodding after the man started crying. Just this sense of the writer trying to claw and hammer her way into the social scene of the street, oblivious to how private and reserved French people are. She's also the designated mourner at a shop's closing, wailing while the people are trying to clear out. To be fair, the people seem to tolerate her fine, but since shops close everywhere one gets the feeling the writer just wants the rue des Martyrs to be and remain forever the same, like fake woolly mammoths at the natural history museum, or a favorite movie one watches again and again. Towards the end of the book she decides to throw a potluck because, well, her book has to have a boffo ending, right? One leaves with the image of her deciding which designer dress to wear for her - I mean the street's - big day. Even so, I'm sure people in the future might appreciate

someone writing this all down about the street. So there's that.

For this year, the only book about Paris, the Paris that I knew 40 years ago as a young, wide-eyed American tourist, is Elaine Sciolino's. Sciolino, her husband, and two children successfully accomplished what I so much wanted to do. Move to Paris and become immersed in the life of THE CITY and become part of the everyday day existence of Paris, the Paris that is so much a part of my imagination, the city so well brought to life in Doisneau's or Cartier-Bresson's Paris in Black and White. Life on the Rue des Martyrs is the street life that I remember, the life which is disappearing under the assault of gentrification. What was and is so unique about Paris, the city that I try to visit often enough to keep the memories alive, is so well captured by Sciolino. I long for the day when wandering from store to store to assemble a meal was part of the normal daily mix of our lives. Time spent engaging with the local shopkeeper, and not just the haired staff at Whole Foods or Star Market, was and should be part of the rich fabric of our lives. Sciolino so well captures those wonderful, daily experiences that only become noticeable and part of our collective longing due to their absence. I need to go to Paris and need to retrace the wonderful journey that Ms. Sciolino has mapped out.

WOW, now this is the real Paris! It is incredible how Sciolino has immersed herself in this community. She manages to break down cultural barriers to get into the histories and lives of the characters who make this unique street come alive. The Only Street in Paris is a wonderful celebration of history, life, culture and food! Sciolino has the captivating power to teach her readers about Paris, while making us laugh (and even brought me to tears at times) through the extremely intimate stories of the characters on the street. I am so glad that someone finally wrote a book about the real Paris that includes the imperfections as well as the wonders! A must read!!!

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