

SUMMARY

The Art of
LIVING ALONE
and Loving It

JANE MATTHEWS



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Summary of “The Art of Living Alone and Loving It” by Jane Matthews

Written by Alyssa Burnette

How to enjoy your own company.

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Introduction

We've all heard the jokes, right? The ones about the creepy people who "live alone in their parents' basement," or the "spinster aunt who lives alone because no one will date her," or worse, the "crazy cat lady who collects cats to fill the void of her nonexistent love life." Each of these jokes portray women who live alone in an extremely negative light. Likewise, books and movies frequently portray single women as being lonely, sad, and desperate; we most often see them sobbing into a pint of Ben & Jerry's and collecting cats because they're lonely. Once they find a boyfriend, however, their lives are suddenly sunshine and rainbows! And because we hear them from early childhood on, we internalize these images at a very young age. So, by the time we're old enough to consider living alone, many of us are too scared of what people will think. As a result, we often rush into unhappy, unsafe, or unfulfilling relationships because we're convinced that anything is better than being alone.

But the author argues that these stereotypes are both incorrect and unfounded. In challenging the negative portrayals we so often see, Matthews asks why single women are never given a different type of representation: the type that portrays them as bold, happy, and fulfilled. After all, she argues, isn't it braver to be at peace with yourself and strike out on your own than desperately seek to fill the void with the wrong person? So, over the course of this summary, we're going to take a look at her top tips for bashing this stigma and creating a life you love.



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How to Live Alone

Anyone can find themselves living alone, whether they want to or not. Many people find themselves in this position because they've lost someone they love, whether that's a partner, a spouse, or your parents. Or maybe you're on your own because you've accepted a job in a new city or moved away for college. But no matter what the reason, if you've found yourself living alone due to unfortunate circumstances, it's easy to feel bitter and displaced. You may wonder what to do with yourself or move through life as though you're lost.

The author uses these examples to illustrate the point that there's a difference between "living alone" and "learning how to live alone." Because anyone can be thrust into that circumstance against their will, but without careful time and planning, you won't learn how to be happy and fulfilled on your own. And without this knowledge, the alternative is a life spent in bitterness, loneliness, and confusion. No one wants that, so let's dive in and take a look at the first lesson you need to learn if you want to thrive on living alone! The first step is to figure out who you want to be. No matter what drove you to live on your own, one aspect of the experience is universally true for everyone: living alone gives you the opportunity to reinvent yourself. So, start by thinking about who you want to be!

Whether we realize it or not, most of us have an idealized version of ourselves-- the self we imagine we will be when we win the lottery or everything goes perfectly in our lives. That self is usually the best of everything we have to offer; in our fantasies, we are funnier, happier, smarter, or more successful. But most of us never become that "perfect" self because we're too busy waiting on our circumstances to do the work for us. "When all the stars align..." we might think, or, "When I get that big promotion..." But as you've probably already figured out, the truth is that even positive circumstances won't bring about positive change if we don't do the hard work of fixing ourselves first. Fortunately, however, living alone offers us a perfect opportunity to do some self-construction.

So, take a good look at that picture-perfect version of yourself in your head. Do you want to be happier? Write down a list of the things you think you need in order to be happy. What steps can you take to get there? Would you like to be more creative? Why not take up a painting or pottery class? Or maybe attend an improv comedy workshop? Writing from her personal experience, the author observes that if you start living into the version of yourself you want to become, you will eventually be that person. That's because, believe it or not, human beings are extremely programmable; our brains are hardwired to crave patterns and repetition like following a certain behavioral routine. It may take our feelings a while to catch up with our behavior, but the longer we live into a certain pattern of behavior, the sooner we internalize it as part of our identities. This truth is something of a double-edged sword, however.

Because it only takes twenty-one days to form a habit and internalize a habit as being integral to our sense of self. So, on one hand, this means that if we train ourselves to form healthy and positive habits, we can quickly create a happy and fulfilling life. But if, on the other hand, we fall into a pattern of making unhealthy choices and indulging toxic thoughts and behaviors, this means that we can easily train ourselves to be toxic, sad, and unhealthy before we even know it. So, as you embark on your new venture of living alone, keep this in mind! No matter how positive or negative your circumstances are, remember that you and only you are responsible for who you become. So, make the choice to view your new life as a positive opportunity that you can use to grow!



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Cultivate Your Relationship With Yourself

Have you ever seen those motivational quotes that say things like, “At the end of the day, all you have is yourself?” or “The person you spend the most time with... is you.” You may not have taken time to think critically about that, but the author observes that it really is true! And nothing shows you that truth more than the experience of living alone. When you live by yourself and you can’t get lost in the hustle and bustle of a family or partner’s background noise, it forces you to really be alone with your own thoughts. It also requires you to take a good hard look at who you really are, even the parts of yourself that you might not like.

The author remarks that personal experience with solitude and self-reflection has taught her two vital things: the importance of being brutally honest with herself and the importance of cultivating her relationship with herself. The latter is especially crucial because it’s the relationship we most often neglect. Because we’re so used to living in our own heads, we often fail to think of our relationship with ourselves as being a proper relationship like one we would have with someone else. For example, when it comes to maintaining our connections with friends or romantic partners, we think about being sensitive and kind. We consider the impact our actions will have on someone else. We look after the other person’s well-being and best interests and put their needs above our own.

But when it comes to our relationships with ourselves, we are often too selfish for our own good. For example, we make toxic or self-destructive decisions like drinking too much or pursuing relationships with people who have a detrimental impact on our self-esteem. We engage in negative self-talk and berate ourselves with comments like, “You’re so stupid!” or “Who would ever like you?” In fact, we do these things so often that we don’t even realize we’re doing them. That’s why the author argues that if you want to thrive while living on your own, you have to start by practicing radical self-love. Because you’re living alone, the person you spend the most time with is yourself. So, it’s important to look after yourself and make decisions that

will help you become the happiest version of yourself. Studies show that speaking kindly to plants helps them grow. So, if that's what kindness does for plants, how much more valuable is it for people? If you keep this in mind, the author affirms that you'll soon begin to treat your relationship with yourself like a relationship you value. So, remember to speak kindly to yourself, be patient, and practice self-care when you need it.



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Build Your Support Network

In the previous chapter, we established that you spend most of your time with yourself. When you live by yourself, you may often find that you have your meals on your own or that you are the first person you wake up to. As a result, you may find that you can hear your own thoughts more clearly when they're not drowned out by someone else's voice. Likewise, as stated in the previous chapter, the absence of another person gives you more time to see who you are. But that doesn't mean that you should shut yourself away from the world or avoid connections with others. In fact, living alone is actually the perfect time to build a dedicated support network!

In this chapter, we're going to attack the perception that living on your own means being lonely. We often assume this because we imagine that the absence of others will result in crippling isolation or depression. But the truth is that this only happens if you let it! In fact, when it comes to the importance of making friends and building a support network, living on your own is no different from living with someone else! In both cases, it's equally important that you make friends and develop close relationships with people you can trust. So, if you don't want to be lonely while living on your own, don't be! Just put yourself out there.

You can do this by making new friends and pursuing new activities. For example, if you've moved to a new town for a new job or college, try connecting with your co-workers or your fellow students. And if this doesn't describe you, don't be discouraged! Both of these examples focus on connecting with the people who are already near you, but those aren't your only options! Remember that living alone is a brave new world; above all, it's a time to push past your comfort zone and embrace new experiences. So, branch out and try to find some local activities that fit your interests. For example, maybe there's a book club at your local library. Maybe you can start volunteering at the animal shelter or help out with a mission to feed the homeless. Or maybe there's a yoga class you'd like to check out. And if the activities around you don't align with your interests, maybe it's time to

find some new interests! By keeping an open mind, there's a good chance that you'll find a new hobby and some new friends to connect with!

The author also recommends staying in touch with your family. If you've previously lived with your parents, grandparents, or siblings, you may notice that you've never had to put in any effort to connect with them before. You were all in the same house, so "staying in touch" was just a natural part of your daily life! When you live alone, however, you'll find that you have to be intentional about reaching out to others. So, call your mom. Write a card for your grandma. Send your brother a cat meme. Start a family group chat and share stories about your day. These gestures may seem small, but they make all the difference in the world when it comes to staying connected.

However, the author observes that with the importance of staying connected comes the caveat that you shouldn't surround yourself with people in an attempt to forget the fact that you live alone. Filling the void with other people is a way to distract yourself from the introspection, bravery, and blessings that come from living alone. So, as you seek new connections, remember to ask yourself: am I genuinely interested in making friends or am I trying to distract myself? If you suspect the answer is the latter, then take a step back and try to evaluate your state of mind. It might be that you're scared of being alone or afraid of being with your thoughts. So, if that's the case, give yourself the freedom to acknowledge your fear and move forward at your own pace. You might have to ease into living alone and slowly work yourself up to being comfortable with your own thoughts, but that's okay. The important thing is that you give yourself the time and space to do so.

And above all, the author cautions that you should not rush into romantic relationships! This is the most common way that people seek to fill the void or distract themselves from living alone, so don't fall prey to that temptation! Recognize that it's awesome and healthy for you to concentrate on yourself before you dive into another relationship. Give yourself time to find out who you really are and grow confident. And as you slowly grow to

find peace with yourself, you'll discover that you don't need someone else in order to feel complete.



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Final Summary

Living alone is often viewed as an unpopular decision, but the author argues that it shouldn't be! Instead, living by yourself can be a hugely rewarding and liberating opportunity. Don't think of yourself as a spinster or someone who's lonely; instead, the author recommends that you think of yourself as a soloist! A soloist is someone who proudly takes center stage and soaks up the spotlight and that's exactly what you should be. So, start by revamping your mindset; enjoy this new opportunity to get to know yourself, form new hobbies, and grow. Branch out to make new friendships, stay connected with your family, but don't use others to distract you from the inherent growth and introspection living alone can facilitate.



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