



# The Desert Pilgrim: En Route to Mysticism and Miracles

*Mary Swander*

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Mary Swander was a lapsed Catholic content with the solitude and tenuous spirituality of a life tied to the Iowa prairie and its seasons. But when a car accident left her paralyzed and in chronic pain with no medical cure in sight, she was forced to look inside herself for strength and for meaning. In *The Desert Pilgrim* she chronicles her miraculous physical recovery and her even more astonishing restoration of faith in the modern world.

It is when she arrives to teach at the University of New Mexico that Mary's journey begins in earnest. In Albuquerque she encounters Father Sergei, a Russian Orthodox monk whose barrio church is hidden away on the once-proud Route 66, now the terrain of crack dealers and the homeless. She meets a curandera, "Lu," an herbal healer whose little pharmacy's first owner rode with Pancho Villa. Together these two will lead her to confront her growing distrust of medical and spiritual authority, and her own dark night of the soul. Evocatively and reflectively written, *The Desert Pilgrim* weaves together history, herbal medicine, physical healing, and what it means-in this modern age-to believe

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