



Until Death Do Us Part: My Struggle to Reclaim Colombia

Ingrid Betancourt

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Ingrid Betancourt, a senator and a presidential candidate in Colombia, grew up among diplomats, literati, and artists who congregated at her parents' elegant home in Paris, France. Her father served as Colombia's ambassador to UNESCO and her mother, a political activist, continued her work on behalf of the country's countless children whose lives were being destroyed by extreme poverty and institutional neglect.

Intellectually, Ingrid was influenced by Pablo Neruda and other Latin American writers like Gabriel García Márquez, who frequented her parents' social circle. She studied at École de Sciences Politiques de Paris, a prestigious academy in France.

From this charmed life, Ingrid Betancourt -- not yet thirty, happily married to a French diplomat, and a mother of two children -- returned to her native country in the late 1980s. On what was initially just a visit, she found her country under internal siege from the drug cartels and the corrupt government that had allowed them to flourish. After seeing what had become of Colombia's democracy, she didn't feel she could leave.

Until Death Do Us Part is the deeply personal story of a woman who gave up a life of comfort and safety to become a political leader in a country being slowly demolished by terrorism, violence, fear, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness. It is a country where democracy has been sacrificed for the well-being of the few, where international criminals determine policy, and where political assassinations are a way of life. Now forty, Ingrid Betancourt has been elected and reelected as a representative and as a senator in Colombia's national legislature. She has founded a political party that has openly confronted Colombia's leaders and has earned the respect of a nation. And now she has become a target of the establishment and the drug cartels behind it.

Forced to move her children out of Colombia for protection against death threats, Ingrid Betancourt remained and continued to fight the political structure that has crumbled under the destructive power of the paramilitary forces, the financial omnipotence of the drug cartels, and the passivity of government-for-sale. Here is a political cocktail that has destroyed countless lives in Colombia and has spread to countries beyond its borders.

A memoir of a life in politics that reads like a fastpaced political thriller, *Until Death Do Us Part* -- already an international bestseller -- is a hair-raising account of one woman's fight against the establishment. It is a story of a woman whose love for her country and faith in democracy gave her the courage to stand up to the power that has subjugated, intimidated, or corrupted all those who opposed it. A chilling account of the dangerous, byzantine machine that runs Colombia, it is also an inspiring story of privilege, sacrifice, and true patriotism.

Until Death Do Us Part: My Struggle to Reclaim Colombia Details

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xx Sarah xx (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

I've always had conflicting feelings about Ingrid Betancourt. Of course her fight against corruption, against the drug lords who (seem to) finance the majority of the country's politicians, against electoral fraud, etc are all very worthy causes and I don't question Betancourt's motivations. What bothers me is that, from the very beginning (when she first ran to get elected as a Congress representative), the media (at least the French media) have been trying to make a saint of Betancourt and turn her into the "savior" of Colombia. It's as if there was only one opinion to be had about her and that criticizing her or her methods was forbidden, as if there was only one side to her story. I feel this has been further accentuated ever since Betancourt has been held hostage by the FARCs: for example, her family, whenever interviewed, seem to be waging a personal war on current President of Colombia Álvaro Uribe and the media just don't give us enough information as to why that is. Once again, we seem to be hearing only one part of the story and some information seems to be withheld from the general public. The involvement of Betancourt's parents in Colombia's political life is never mentioned in the media, which I find truly amazing, as it gives a very different outlook on her motivations and struggle. Were it not for this book, I would never have known Betancourt's parents had been prominent political figures in Colombia!

I was also surprised to find little mention of the FARCs in this book, which was written only a year before Betancourt's capture. While doing some research on the subject, I came across an interesting review for this book, which can be read here (you might have to register to be able to read the review).

The writing is a bit superficial, shallow, not to say quite poor at times. I wonder whether this has to do with the English translation or if this is a problem with the original version also.

Diane S ? says

I finished this a few days ago, was trying to figure out what bothered me about this book. My son recently returned from a nine days trip to Colombia, to attend a friend's wedding, he stayed in Bogota with the bride's brother. He loved the country, so beautiful, but he did say there were places it was better not to go, places that didn't seem safe. I think many of us are aware of the powerful hold the drug cartels have had on their government. Corruption and bribery a way of life.

The reader does get a sense of Betancourt's life, from her upbringing, her mother being very involved in the government, and the plight of children. The threats made to Ingrid when she was running for President, causing her to send her two children to France, to live with their father, her ex-husband. Her capture and imprisonment by FARCs, six long years before she and others held captive were rescued. We also get a keen sense of her devotion to her country, and the way this government works, or doesn't.

Now back to what bothered me. I didn't much like her, her self-righteousness and constant refrain of how beyond corruption she was, became repetitive, self-indulgent. Even her capture could have been avoided had she just listened, but she thought she knew better. Of course other readers may not feel this way, and much of it is interesting and informative. I looked on WIKI to see where she is now, as this book ended quite a few

years ago. You can do the same, makes for interesting reading, maybe more so than this book.

Blair says

Colombia

I have to process this a bit more before I finish (ahem, start) the review.

A thought before I review the book;
I think she really wanted to change Colombian politics.

I knew very little of her before I was given this book about two years ago. I knew she was a maverick politician, but knowing what Latin American politics are like I thought that it was a fly by night thing or that again folks are deluded in a great hope for someone to make happen the MASSIVE changes that need to be made.

I want to like this book more than I did, and I am not quite sure why I feel this way. I like the prose, you can tell it was originally written in another language (I believe it was translated from French), which is a completely different way of speaking and therefore it reads differently too. But perhaps that is the thing, it was originally in French. I am sure there is a perfectly reasonable explanation but that fact just sits in my head with a question mark and not even a simple enough reason enters my mind... unless it was to garner French support for presidential election.

My favorite part of this book is her mother, I want to meet this woman, and all the more so since she handled Ingrids captivity so gracefully.

Andrea says

In following the FARC, you can't help but feel for the families of those held hostage. In an attempt to make Betancourt more human, I read her autobiography. I enjoyed her book and I think she truthfully conveys the struggle within her to follow in her parents footsteps and make Colombia a better place and to live a safer life for her children. I think I wouldn't be giving much away to tell you that she ultimately chooses to return to Colombia and fight corruption, making her first and enemy of the government, then the traffickers and most recently and unfortunately the FARC.

It pleased me to know that Betancourt did make some progress in bettering Colombia and could have made more had she not been taken hostage by the FARC in 2002. I can only hope that she is released soon to see those family members who are made so real in this book.

For those who want some additional context:

Kidnapped on February 23, 2002, Betancourt has become an international symbol in the struggle for liberty and the fight against barbarity. Before being captured by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), she was a voice of hope for the Colombian people, leading a courageous fight against political corruption, violence, and illegal detentions.

Carolyn Heinze says

Not terribly well written; more like a really long election pamphlet, which I guess it is, considering when it was published. Provides a nice, simple rundown of how politics (don't) work in Colombia, though it would have been nice if she had dug a little deeper. I guess my biggest problem is that I'm skeptical of the blindly idealistic: I wonder if blind idealism can exist without underlying motives, and; blind idealism is often accompanied by an arrogance that puts the blindly idealistic into positions where carrying out their ideals is compromised or impossible.

That said, the woman has courage, which will hopefully hold her through until she, and those she is being held in captivity with, are (hopefully, hopefully, hopefully) freed. In light of recent events, that may be a while, but let's hope idealism and pragmatism meet to make it happen.

Π?νος Τουρλ?ς says

?χω διαβ?σει πολλ?ς αντικρου?μενες απ?ψεις για το χαρακτ?ρα της Μπετανκο?ρ κι ομολογ? ?τι αυτ? το βιβλ?ο το δι?βασα με σκεπτικισμ?. Μου ?ρεσε, με κρ?τησε, η γερουσιαστ?ς γρ?φει καλ?, ουσιαστικ? και κα?ρια. Μ?σα απ? το κε?μεν? της γν?ρισα μια Κολομβ?α που δεν ?ξερα ?τι ?ταν τ?σο διεφθαρμ?νη, τ?σο σ?πια, μια χ?ρα ?που κυριαρχε? και γηγ?ται η Μαφ?α και τα καρτ?λ ναρκωτικ?v, ?που δεν υπ?ρχει προσωπικ? πρωτοβουλ?α, ?που ο λα?ς χαλιναγωγε?ται απ? την τηλε?ραση και τα καλ?ς πλασμ?vα και αληθοφαν? "τεκμ?ρια" που παρουσι?ζει αυτ? κατ? καιρο?ς.

Η Μπετανκο?ρ αφηγε?ται τα πιαδικ? της χρ?vια, τους δ?ο δεσμο?ς της με αντ?στοιχους συζ?vους αλλ? κυρ?ως και περισσ?τερο τον αγ?vνα της να αντισταθε? σε αυτ?v τη διαφθορ?, να παλ?ψει για τη διαφ?vεια και να φωτ?σει αθ?ατες πλευρ?ς των κυβερν?σεων, ?χι γιατ? ε?vαι κατ? της διαφθορ?ς μ?vο αλλ? και γιατ? τα χρ?ματα που εμπλ?κονται σε νοθε?ες, εκβιασμο?ς, λαθρεμπ?ριο θα μπορ?σαν να βελτι?σουν τη ζω? χ?λι?δων φτωχ?v οικογενει?v της Κολομβ?ας που πεθα?vουν απ? πε?vνα και στερ?σεις και ?χουν π?ψει να ελπ?ζουν και να ονειρε?ονται. Αντικειμενικ? (;) η Μπετανκο?ρ καταγρ?φει ?λες τις παγ?δες που της στ?σανε και ?λα τα εμπ?δια που συν?vτησε στη σταυροφορ?α της για μια καλ?τερη Κολομβ?α και την επιτυχ?α της να εκλεγε? γερουσιαστ?ς. Δεν πρ?λαβε ?μως να κ?vει κ?τι ως γερουσιαστ?ς γιατ? απ?χθη απ? αντ?ρτες (απελευθερ?θηκε το 2008 και η εμπειρ?α της γρ?φτηκε σε ν?vο βιβλ?ο).

Απ? την ?λλη ?μως, μια γυνα?κα που μεγ?λωσε χωρ?ς στερ?σεις και σε αριστοκρατικ? σχολε?α δ?σκολα θα αφοσιωθε? αφιλοκερδ?ς σε ?ναν αγ?vνα τ?τοιου μεγ?θους και ?ντασης, κρατ? ?μως την πρ?ταση που ?λεγε συν?vχεια ο πατ?ρας της στη συγγραφ?α: το ?τι ανατρ?φηκες ?τσι ?νετα το χρωστ?ς στην Κολομβ?α και πρ?πει να της το ανταποδ?σεις, οπ?τε μια τ?τοια γαλουχ?α σ?vουρα δε βοηθ? να αναπτυχθε? τυχ?v κομπασμ?v, ?παρση κλπ. Κι ?μως ?χω διαβ?σει και για τ?τοιες εκδηλ?σεις του χαρακτ?ρα της.

Τ?λος π?vτων, ο ?νθρωπος ε?vαι π?vτα σ?vθετη προσωπικ?τητα, οπ?τε το βιβλ?ο το συστ?vω σε ?σους θ?vουν να γνωρ?σουν μια ?λλη Κολομβ?α και για ?σους ενδιαφ?ρονται για καλογραμμ?vα απομνημονε?ματα.

Kelly Rincon says

Such a good book. Simple, clear writing. Gave me my first real insight into Colombia, and why it was the way it was/is. She's such an inspiration.

Ennie says

Het boek geeft een goed beeld van de corrupte toestanden in Colombia. Ja, corruptie is inherent aan macht en machtsuitoefenig en is dus moeilijk te veranderen of uit te roeien. Dat blijkt ook weer in dit boek. Ingrid Bétancourt's schrijftrant is boeiend. Ik heb nog 2 boeken van haar liggen en ga die hier gelijk achteraan lezen.

TonyAlmeida says

"Deus quer, o Homem sonha e a obra nasce" parece ser o mote deste livro onde o empenho e uma extrema força de vontade parecem conseguir mover de facto o mundo.

Trata-se de uma autobiografia política da Ingrid Betancourt, escrita pouco tempo antes do seu rapto pelas FARC (Forças Armadas Revolucionárias da Colômbia), onde relata a sua entrada na vida política colombiana - impelida pelo seu amor a este país sul-americano - e a sua luta contra o poder corrupto instalado, este sempre de mãos dadas com os cartéis de droga.

Um relato que impressiona pela carácter e pela força de vontade de uma pessoa que tinha tudo para viver a sua vida em família num verdadeiro clima de paz, num paraíso turístico, mas que resolve sacrificar tudo isto pela defesa de um ideal político.

Com uma escrita bastante fluída, e sem qualquer tipo de constrangimentos - facto que incomodou profundamente o anterior presidente colombiano Ernesto Samper, um dos principais visados neste relato - Ingrid Betancourt põe a nu os podres políticos de um país que então vivia resignada a sua sorte, convencida que nada já havia a fazer (será que ainda será assim?).

O livro termina ainda antes de Ingrid Betancourt assumir a sua candidatura à presidência da Colômbia, mas será precisamente este livro que acabaria por pesar significativamente, e de forma negativa, na sua campanha eleitoral uma vez que o clima de corrupção nele relatado foi visto como desprestigiante para o país, facto fortemente criticado pelos opositores políticos.

Carol Hallifax says

Ingrid Betancourt is a courageous dedicated woman and her life proves it. Against all odds she triumphs but there is so much more that she wants to do for her country, Columbia. If you want to read about a strong

woman you will be amazed by this story.

Danielle says

Ingrid Betancourt does a stunning job portraying Colombian society and political situations through clear, straight-forward tones. Her memoir is filled with insight to what made her the strong politician she became and the cultural context in which the corruption in Colombia grew. She puts a human face on inhuman circumstances, and makes the key players in Colombia's history come to life through her point of views. There is also an element of humor throughout the book- Ingrid won her first campaign by throwing around condoms. She is an excellent example of what one person can grow to stand for. Ingrid was taken into captivity shortly after the book was published, and was rescued in 2008. A must read for anyone interested in cultures and politics, however the end does end up sounding rather like a political campaign, and you have to wonder exactly HOW honest this book is. It was written prior to her hostage situation.

Martha says

A moving, inspiring, and hopeful memoir written by an amazing and charismatic Colombian woman, Ingrid Betancourt, who has sacrificed herself on every level (including physically) in the hopes of bringing peace and justice to Colombia; a country who has been through hell and back, but whose people have never lost their endearing spirit, unwavering patriotism, and the dream of peace. I know this because my mother is one of them. I found myself riding a wave of emotions as I relived the struggles she faced both as a mother as well as a political activist who fought relentlessly against corruption. This memoir is a testimony of her strength, courage and determination--traits which I pray have not left her today as she was recently rescued from years of being held captive by the guerrilla somewhere deep in the jungles of my beloved country, Colombia. I hope that she runs for the president for she surely is capable and would win without question :)

Terri says

For anyone with an interest in Colombia, this is a fascinating and up-close look at Colombian politics in the 1990s. It recounts Betancourt's political career prior to her kidnapping by the FARC, which is described in her later book *Even Silence Has an End: My Six Years of Captivity in the Colombian Jungle*.

KOMET says

This book reads not only as an autobiography, but also as a political testament from a truly courageous woman. No matter what your political leanings or philosophy may be, you have to be impressed with Betancourt's integrity and character. Reading this book has given me an interest into why Colombia is in the dire straits that it's in today.

Ingrid Betancourt's quest for a peaceful, reformed Colombia may seem quixotic. But it is reassuring to know that there are politicians like her in the world. Let us hope that she will be freed unharmed so that she can again stand up for what Colombia needs today: peace, stability, progress, and social justice.

[I FINISHED READING THIS BOOK ON June 12th, 2003. Since that time, Ingrid Betancourt has thankfully been freed and lives now in France.]

Shawn says

Before going to Colombia South America I went though and checked out and read every book I could about the country from my library. This was one of the books.

I have to say this is the only biography that I ever read that at the end of the book I ACTIVELY disliked the person. Usually when you read about someone's hardship and struggles you end up with some degree of empathy for them. The entire time I read this book I kept on thinking...what a b&*%^\$ (witch works well here too).

While Mrs Betancourt went through a harrowing time (she was captured and held by Colombia guerrilla's) she both deserved it (she was advised not to go into the area and told the area was so dangerous the government would not guard her) and her behavior both before, during and after the event was extremely selfish. Because of her arrogance and feelings of self importance she repetitively put the lives of others in danger. The way she treated her fellow captives is horrific.

When I got to Colombia I finally got the courage to ask people about her (since Betancourt told me in her book how important she was to Colombia and how much she was loved I was reluctant to say anything since my own opinion was so strong) and found the in general the Colombia people felt as I did about her. This lady is hated and for good reason.

A note on Colombia. Colombia is a beautiful country with some amazing nice generous people (Betancourt is French) and I HIGHLY recommend visiting it. The tales of Colombia's violence and kidnapping are for the most part are a thing of the past. I actually felt safer in Colombia than many other South American countries.
