

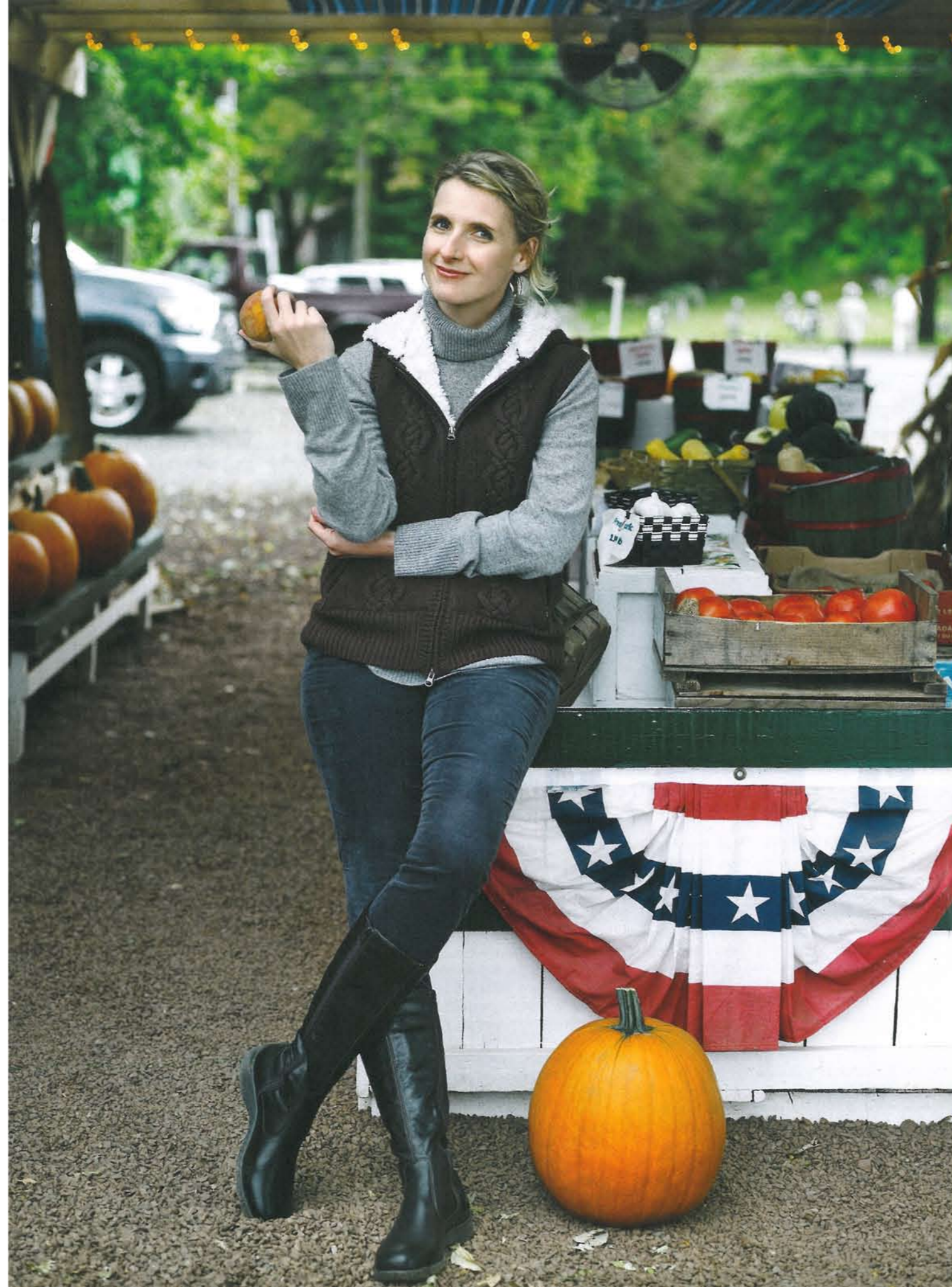
# EAT, PRAY, LOVE again

In the sequel to her inspiring best-selling memoir, author Elizabeth Gilbert tells SHARON KRUM how she faced her greatest fear – marriage.

Elizabeth Gilbert likes to say that when you're getting married, it can be helpful if you own a church. In her case, it's a tiny Presbyterian chapel built in 1802, in Frenchtown, New Jersey, later converted to a house, now her home. Yet it still has the soul of a church and it was there that Elizabeth tied the knot for the second time.

There were a lot of tears from everybody," remembers Elizabeth, 40, author of the best-selling phenomenon *Eat, Pray, Love*, her intimate memoir detailing the painful break-up of her first marriage, an aching love affair and journey to rediscover herself while travelling through three countries – eating through Italy, meditating in India and falling in love in Indonesia. Oscar-winner Julia Roberts is playing her in the upcoming movie.

Yet it turns out the church setting was the only conventional thing about her wedding to the charming, Brazilian-born, Australian citizen she fell in love with at the end of *Eat, Pray, Love*, the man millions of her readers know as "Felipe". Forget a white wedding gown – Elizabeth was married wearing a red jumper and yellow silk skirt. Felipe, 57, wore jeans and a blue jumper. >>>



Married by the mayor, there were 10 guests and Felipe spent two days preparing the wedding lunch.

"He had to be reminded to take off his apron before he got married, which my mum said was an excellent omen," Elizabeth says, smiling. Then, after their guests left, Elizabeth and Felipe cleaned up the dishes.

That was in February 2007. Now, Elizabeth tells you their marriage has given her a joy she doesn't take for granted. "I really enjoy the life and the hours that I get to spend with this guy, who is such a good person and brings such a sense of calmness to me that I need.

"I remember when we first met in Bali and we ordered a pizza, and I was just gorging myself and there was one piece left, and I said, 'I want that last piece so

much, but I really shouldn't'. And he said, 'I have a really good idea. Why don't you just be yourself?' I said, 'Great', and I grabbed it!"

There's little doubt that, if a second marriage could agree with anyone, it would be Elizabeth Gilbert, which is why it's stunning to learn just how little she wanted to marry again and how Felipe felt the same. Both had bad divorces behind them and, while they loved each other deeply, they had sworn never again to tie the knot. How and why she and Felipe ended up taking their vows Elizabeth explains in her new book, *Committed: A Sceptic Makes Peace With Marriage*.

It's a more serious book, in which Elizabeth puts their relationship and marriage under the microscope, compared to the adventure and romance of *Eat, Pray, Love*. "I think there was one sentence Felipe asked me to take out that was too revealing, but with everything else he was fine," she confides.

"But he said, 'This is the last one. No more books about me!' And I said, 'No more books about me, either!'"

Sitting outdoors at a cafe on Frenchtown's main street with mutt Rocky in her lap, Elizabeth is recounting what turned out to be the very dramatic journey that led her to saying, "I do". As she chats, locals walking by stop to say hello. Everyone knows her here and it's not simply because of her book. With a population of nearly 1500, Frenchtown is genuine small-town, neighbourly



Elizabeth Gilbert and Felipe on their wedding day in 2007.

## "THIS WAS NOT TEEN LOVE. NOR WAS IT PUPPY-DOG LOVE OR LAST-DAY-OF-SUMMER-CAMP LOVE."

America. She and Felipe also own a business here called Two Buttons, which sells artifacts, furniture and jewellery from Asia.

Elizabeth loves living here, from the beauty of the town to the privacy it gives her. "There is a real sense that people look out for us here." Elsewhere, she's a celebrity, but mention it and she shakes her head, laughing. "I am not that famous; I've never been on *Dancing With The Stars!*" she jokes. Seriously, though, she has appeared on *Oprah* and, with seven million books sold in 41 countries, thousands of women have adopted her as their inspiration.

"I can't take it in [the success]," Elizabeth says, humbly. "But when I meet people who are touched by the book, I see it reminded them of their own potential and passions."

Elizabeth has said that one of her qualities is she can make friends with anyone, even the dead, and you can see why: she has a gentle voice that draws you in when she talks and she's funny, contemplative, curious and wise all at once.

Yet Felipe is not with us because he wants his privacy ("Felipe" is a pseudonym), but Elizabeth is happy to fill in the blanks. Born in Brazil, Felipe travelled for a decade before settling in Australia for 17 years. "he just loved it", running a gemstone business.

He and his Australian ex-wife lived in Canberra, where she worked in the

diplomatic corps. After their divorce, he moved to Bali, but his son and daughter: both in their late 20s, live here and he and Elizabeth visit once or twice year. "They are stupendous," she says of her step-children. "His son just got married and my whole family went."

Elizabeth grew up on a small Christmas-tree farm in Connecticut and after university, worked as a journalist and wrote fiction. She was engaged at 23, married at 25 and, as she describes in *Eat, Pray, Love*, found herself weeping on the bathroom floor at 31. There were other issues, but the breaking point was children – he wanted them, she didn't. Their split and divorce were nasty, and triggered a deep depression in her.

Her plan to travel through Italy, India and Indonesia was to heal herself, not look for love. Yet she met Felipe at a dinner

party in Bali. She had been studying with a healer and was all wide-eyed enthusiasm, while he was the amused, older, knowing lover who called Elizabeth "darling". Theirs was a courtship that was slow, sensual and mature. "This was not teen love. Nor was it puppy-dog love or last-day-of-summer-camp love," she writes.

When Elizabeth's year of travel ended they flew around the world to meet up, but eventually, Felipe made the decision to move to the United States. Elizabeth says, if you had met them around that time, you would have thought they were already married. They wore gold rings and had sworn love and fidelity to each other – except it wasn't legal. "We were acting like husband and wife, yet refusing to do this one thing which, to us, didn't feel like a small thing. It felt intrusive and frightening."

They set up home in Philadelphia, but Felipe's visa meant he had to leave the US every three months. Then, in May 2006, while returning together from a business trip, Felipe was detained for interrogation at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, in Texas, for six hours before learning he was banned from re-entering the US. Immigration officials believed he was basically living there without a visa. The only way to return was if he and Elizabeth married.

"I love you so much, I will even marry you," Felipe told Elizabeth just before they took him off to jail, then put him on a flight to Australia. **continued on page 205**

## EAT, PRAY, LOVE again

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"And I love you so much," Elizabeth promised him, "that I will even marry you."

With Felipe barred from the US, Elizabeth left to be with him. With money tight – *Eat, Pray, Love* was yet to take off – they travelled throughout South-East Asia for nearly a year, waiting for Felipe's fiancée visa interview at the US consulate in Sydney.

For months, as they travelled and tension pulled at them, Elizabeth worked to make peace with her fear of marriage. She studied books about the history of marriage and talked openly with friends, family and women across Asia about theirs.

One day, she listed all her flaws for Felipe so there would be no surprises when they became Mr and Mrs (hilariously, he asked if she could tell him something he didn't know). Felipe then listed his, including, "I can't look at you without wanting to have sex with you".

Her fear, Elizabeth admits, was that once legally married, they would step on to some kind of assembly line. "One of the mistakes I made in my first marriage was thinking rules don't apply to us. Then you wake up five years later and you're living out these roles that are shocking for you. Why am I cooking all the dinners and, suddenly, I'm a nagging wife. Is the word 'wife' why I'm acting like this?"

She also writes about her grandmother, Maude, who cut up a treasured wine-coloured coat to make a Christmas gift for her new baby daughter. Elizabeth worried that the women in her family had a tendency to sacrifice too much of themselves once married.

Yet you have the freedom to be a different kind of wife, I say, and she is. "Felipe was a first-wave feminist back in the '70s," she claims, proudly. "He is the cook in the house. It would never occur to him not to do the laundry. He stayed home with his kids when they were little.

"So, I have an ally helping me to not replicate those roles. He doesn't have trouble with me going out in the world and making something of myself. And we're not going to have children, which eliminates an enormous amount of that issue."

Felipe loves wine, Elizabeth loves yoga. Felipe, she reveals, mangles the names of celebrities, such as "George Cruise", and sings while cooking dinner. He cherishes quiet, she likes activity. Their 17-year age difference? She appreciates it.

"You're with somebody who has been disappointed and humbled, who doesn't have the narcissism and ego of youth," she says. "He knows who he is and isn't." Elizabeth finally changed her attitude to marriage after reading a book that suggested it was actually a radical act of intimacy, an idea she loved.

On January 18, 2007, Felipe was first in line at the US consulate in Sydney. Visa in hand, he flew to America, where a few weeks later, he and Elizabeth married in their converted church. And then, as if there hadn't been enough excitement, *Eat, Pray, Love* exploded onto the best-seller lists. The book spawned an army of fans – and detractors, who carped it was self-conscious – and Elizabeth sat on Oprah's couch.

"I think Oprah is a remarkable person. She got my aunts in Minnesota reading *Anna Karenina*," Elizabeth says, awed. "Even in the small interactions we had, Oprah gives a great deal of herself."

Now, the author is set to see herself portrayed on screen in the form of Julia Roberts, while Javier Bardem will be Felipe. "Honestly, she's the most beautiful person I've ever seen," she says of meeting Julia. "It's like she's lit from behind."

"We went to Rome and watched a little bit of filming. It's completely surreal to see someone playing you. They were shooting this scene in a restaurant and Felipe and I burst into tears. It was me and I fell for it!"

Elizabeth didn't go on set again, but when Felipe's daughter was visiting from Australia, "I couldn't resist calling the producer and asking, 'Can she be an extra?' She was so excited. She did a scene standing next to Julia at a party."

If they made a movie about Elizabeth today, it might not have the Bali sunsets or delicious Roman gelato she once savoured, but that's fine. "It's funny. For two people who met as travellers and were all about travel, I think both of us long for a more sedate life now.

"That said," she laughs, "we are planning a trip to Puerto Rico in a few weeks ..." ■

**Committed: A Sceptic Makes Peace With Marriage, will be published in Australia on January 4, rrp \$32.99. Elizabeth Gilbert will tour Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland in May. For more details, visit [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com).**