

Pass It On®...

The World Awaits You

The story of the first woman to circumnavigate the world.

The name Jeanne Baret is hardly a household name. She was born in rural France in the mid 1700s and her family teetered on the edge of poverty. But Jeanne was an unusual woman -- curious, intelligent, and determined to leave her small village to see what lies beyond. Little did she know how far she would go. Ambition can be like a mighty storm that sweeps you away to unknown places. And so it was with Jeanne.

Jeanne's first big adventure was to leave her rural village for a nearby town, which at the time seemed a world away. She found work as a housekeeper for Botanist Philibert Commerson, a stoic and deliberate researcher who also suffered ill health. He came to rely on Jeanne for more than house cleaning. Recognizing her intelligence he made her his assistant and they soon moved to Paris.

It was in the midst of the Enlightenment, and appetites for exploration were at an all-time high. King Louis XV agreed to an around-the-world expedition to establish trading partners and show off a little naval power to the world. Philibert Commerson was commissioned as botanist for the two-year journey. To make the trip, he would need his assistant. Except she was a woman, and women were prohibited from those roles.

Seemingly resigned, Commerson boarded the ship with his many cases and the aid of his cabin boy. Conditions aboard an 18th-century vessel were miserable at best, crewed with hardened men in cramped conditions who lived by their own code. The expedition set sail. It wasn't long before Commerson's cabin boy was outed as a woman. But it was too late, and Jeanne was too indispensable to be left at the next port.

History is vague on the partnership between Jeanne and Philibert. Perhaps not giving Jeanne Baret the credit she deserved. After all, it was unusual for a woman to accomplish what she did, not only circumnavigating the globe but also contributing to the journey's botanical discoveries.

Though unschooled, Jean became a major contributor to the expedition through diligent study and hard work. Ambition was her mentor, and she became an equal collaborator to the stoic botanist, leaving her name, and her inspiring story, in the history books.

Ambition... PassItOn.com

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