Experiential Nonfiction

"What's it like to...?" Many of us ask that question; a few not only try it out, but tell the tale. Here's a selection of such true-life adventures.

Animal Vegetable Miracle: a year of food life
by Kingsolver, Barbara
641.0973 KI
Novelist and essayist Kingsolver recounts her family's year as so-called localvores, eating (almost) only what they can grow on their farm in Virginia or buy from local sources. (Sometimes, you really need chocolate.)

French Revolutions: cycling the Tour de France
by Moore, Tim
914.404 MOO
Six weeks before the 2000 Tour de France, Moore, neither ultrafit nor an expert cyclist, rides the route as a personal (and hilarious) "Tour de Moore."

Grand Obsession: a piano odyssey
by Knize, Perri
786.2092 KNI
A journalist's return to the piano galvanizes a quest for the perfect instrument, for the meaning of perfection, and a consideration of the cost of perfectionism.

Halfway to heaven : my white-knuckled and knuckle-headed quest for the Rocky Mountain high
by Obmascik, Mark
796.522 OBM
A middle-aged non-mountaineer sets out to summit all 54 of Colorado's 14,000-foot-plus peaks. "Not alone," says his wife, who herself hates heights. This precipitates a search for climbing partners ("man-dates," as Obmascik dubs them). But man+mountain is the true, lasting romance.

Heat: an amateur's adventures as kitchen slave, line cook, pasta maker, and apprentice to a Dante-quoting butcher in Tuscany
by Buford, Bill
641.5945 BU
A New Yorker staff writer and foodie enrolls himself as "slave" first to chef Mario Batali in New York, then to a pasta maker and a butcher in Italy. He survives, bloodied, to tell the tale.

Julie and Julia: 365 days, 524 recipes, 1 tiny apartment kitchen...
by Powell, Julie
BIO POWELL
A NYC blogger chronicles her year of cooking every recipe in Julia Child's Mastering the Art of French Cooking. We've noticed food stains on some of the library's copies. Perhaps we should check out bibs?

Naked Wine: letting grapes do what comes naturally
by Feiring, Alice
641.22 FEI

A fierce proponent of natural wines decides to practice what she preaches and create her own vintage. Stomping grapes comes naturally. So do pests, bad weather, and a host of unforeseen complications.

Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America
by Ehrenreich, Barbara
305.569 EHR
Taking along only $1000 in start-up funds, a car, and her laptop, journalist and social critic Ehrenreich suffers the pain and humiliation of trying make a living as a low-skilled, minimum wage worker. This is experience fully lived, and ferociously articulated.

Piano Lessons: music, love & true adventures
by Adams, Noah
BIO ADAMS
NPR commentator Adams chronicles a year of piano lessons that culminates in a bravura Christmas gift for his wife: a candlelit performance of their favorite work, Schumann's Traümerei. He's in a tuxedo, snow falling gently outside...

A Place of My Own: the education of an amateur builder
by Pollan, Michael
690.837 POL
A writer with no experience in carpentry or construction "gets away from words" and builds a writer's studio in his yard. Assembly is required, and embraced. Then, he gets back to words.

Tolstoy and the Purple Chair: my year of magical reading
by Sankovitch, Nina
028.8 SAN
On her 46th birthday, Sankovitch, who'd hurled herself into hyperactivity to combat grief, chooses instead to "escape back to life" by reading--and writing about--a book a day, for the next year. "Escapism" is affirmed as life-enhancing: a lovely twist.

The Year of Living Biblically: one man's humble quest to follow the bible as literally as possible
by Jacobs, A.J.
220 JAC
A.J. Jacobs chronicles his attempt to obey the Bible--not just the Ten Commandments--as literally as possible, day after day, for a full year. It isn't easy.