

Dancing on Waves: A True Story of Finding Love & Redemption in the Ocean

Hillary Hauser

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(237pp)

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Dancing on Waves is a thoughtful memoir that merges personal memories with activist claims about people's responsibilities toward the oceans.

Scuba diver and former ocean reporter Hillary Hauser has survived a life-threatening illness, come to terms with an unwanted divorce, and grieved the deaths of friends and family members. In her musing memoir *Dancing on Waves*, she merges these memories with arguments in support of environmental activism.

From an early age, Hauser found solace in the solitude of the beach and the calming sounds of the sea. At the same time, she noted that the ocean could be brutal: shark attacks, drownings, and accidents were a routine part of seafaring life. Striking, often beautiful descriptions capture the lives lost in Hauser's own circle, as well as dangerous features like underwater sinkholes and sea caves across the world.

Though the sea's majesty occupies a considerable portion of the book, Hauser writes that she did not turn toward the water for healing herself until she faced severe life challenges. Her husband left her for a younger woman, making a unilateral decision about ending their marriage. Soon after, she received a breast cancer diagnosis. As despair and depression became her constant companions, she began devouring self-help books by the dozen. She also walked on the beach each afternoon and came face to face with the industrial pollution that marred it. Her response was immediate. In 1998, she and a friend created Heal the Ocean, an organization dedicated to addressing sea pollution and corporate dumping. They researched wastewater reclamation and the benefits of sewers for California's coastal communities, evolving from supporters of local beach clean-ups into respected promoters of worldwide environmental sustainability.

But the book, which was written more than twenty years ago and then placed in a closet, is dated. Its brief epilogue works to tie its content to present-day concerns, but its connections are thin and sketched in. And though Heal the Ocean grew to become part of a nationwide coalition of environmentalist efforts, the particulars of its growth, and of how it answered challenges like recruitment among younger generations, are kept vague.

When it comes to discussing the healing role of activism, the book is more clear. Hauser writes in compelling terms about immersing herself in efforts beyond her own immediate concerns. Further, her experiences with regaining mental health are presented in matter-of-fact, honest terms, with clear-eyed assessments of psychotherapy that detail what worked for her and what did not.

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ELEANOR BADER (October 6, 2022)

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