

## Swimming to the Top of the Tide

**Patricia Hanlon**

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Forty years of living and boating around New England's largest stretch of salt marsh gave Patricia Hanlon good familiarity with her local environment. However, it wasn't until she was immersed in the habitat as a swimmer that she understood the ecosystem well. Her amphibious view opened up new understanding of the fertile ecology, imparting greater appreciation for its beauty.

Beginning with a beguiling account of a year of swims around marshlands in Massachusetts' Cape Ann region, *Swimming to the Top of the Tide* starts in summer and evokes the delights of the "frictionless, weightless bliss" of swimming with the tide, uncovering details of the geography and human and natural history of this "diffuse, squishy, soggy meeting between land and sea."

As air and water temperatures cool, there are frequent, expensive trips to the dive shop for insulating wet suits and other gear. There's concerning frisson in reading about Hanlon's plunges into icier waters, more so when she must steal time for her slushy forays after work, when daylight is scarce.

The book funnels Hanlon's observations about salt marshes into wider discussions of their importance in sustaining vital food chains, sequestering carbon, protecting shorelines during storm surges, and filtering water. She is as skilled at demystifying complex scientific concepts as she is in portraying gold-spangled waterline sunsets and muted winter compositions of marsh grasses. The whole is enriched with personal reflections on raising a family, aging, and the changing nature of marriage.

The final section builds upon Hanlon's in-depth explorations of the ecosystem to discuss other marshlands and how they are impacted by climate change and other human alterations of the earth. *Swimming to the Top of the Tide* is a personal evocation of a natural landscape, naming many reasons why it must be protected.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May / June 2021)

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