

To Hold The Sun

Chas Watkins

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The author's admirable philosophy of life shines through this well-constructed, engaging story.

Using fiction to convey a life philosophy is a timeless tradition in books, and Chas Watkins's *To Hold the Sun* nicely fits the category. Watkins, a Realtor and radio DJ, says he was inspired to write the story as a gift to his children.

The plot is simple: A down-on-his-luck journalist is assigned to interview Paul Haletine, an unusual man who seems to spend most of his time contemplating life and doing handstands. Paul lives on Roatan, a Honduran island (where the author also resides). At first, the journalist, whose name is never revealed, is drawn in by the island's beauty and Paul's quirky personality. He soon becomes intrigued by the way Paul looks at life. In a classic wise man-disciple relationship, Paul conveys his philosophy to the journalist through a series of conversations and "exercises" he asks the journalist to complete. The journalist is, of course, the surrogate for the reader, who sees Paul's wisdom unfold throughout the story.

Watkins's story proceeds at a natural pace as the journalist and Paul become acquainted. Along the way, the author shares some of what the island itself has to offer, including diving, beach life, and sunsets. The result is a tale that is nicely balanced with diversions rather than merely dialogue. Near the story's conclusion, Paul shares with the journalist handouts from a talk he gave—a clever technique to reinforce and summarize the life lessons conveyed in the book. In the concluding scene, the significance of handstands and the book's title become apparent.

Paul's philosophy is worthy of deep thought. A lot of what he has to say is memorable; for example:

It's astonishing how much more you can enjoy life and be happier if you actually practice enjoying the now by experiencing it to its fullest.

When we're specifically looking for something, we often fail to notice other things that are right in front of our eyes.

The act of practicing compassion and helping others, rather than fearing them, would allow us to live longer and happier lives.

In addition to weaving a captivating story, Watkins intersperses high-quality black-and-white photos of the island and underwater scenes, grounding the book in reality and creating the sense that the characters are real people. The cover image of a silhouetted man doing a handstand against a color aerial photo of the island is quite striking.

Watkins may have intended *To Hold the Sun* for his children, but it is just as much a gift for the reader, who is sure to be enlightened by the main character's noble perspective on life. This is a little gem of a book.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (July 9, 2014)

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