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Fearless: One Woman, One Kayak, One Continent



Synopsis

Like the instant classic *The Last American Man*, *Fearless* is the story of a remarkable individual who accepts no personal limits—including fear. Freya Hoffmeister, a forty-six-year-old former skydiver, gymnast, marksman, and Miss Germany contestant, left her twelve-year-old son behind to paddle alone and unsupported around Australia—a year-long adventure that virtually every expert guaranteed would get her killed. She planned not only to survive the 9,420-mile trip through huge, shark-infested seas, but to do it faster than the only other paddler who did it. As journalist and expert kayaker Joe Glickman details the voyage of this Teutonic force of nature, he captures interminable days on the water and nights camped out on deserted islands; hair-raising encounters with crocs and great white sharks; and the daring 300-mile open-ocean crossing that shaved three weeks off her trip. For 332 days Glickman followed Freya's journey on her blog—along with a far-flung audience of awestruck, even lovesick, groupies—as she took on one terrifying ordeal after the next. In the end, he says, her vanity and pigheadedness paled next to her nearly superhuman ability to master fear and persevere.

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Customer Reviews

Joe Glickman is well known in the kayaking world for his highly entertaining style of writing and he doesn't disappoint in this, his book about Freya Hoffmeister's extraordinary paddle around Australia. Humorous and insightful by turns, Glickman describes how Hoffmeister took on the challenges of sharks, salt water crocodiles, sea snakes and, most of all, some of the most savage weather conditions to be found on the planet. Apart from the 375 mile direct route that she took across the Gulf of Carpentaria (seven nights on the open ocean, "sleeping" balanced on the back deck), the most trying section of the trip was along the notorious Zuytdorp Cliffs - a 120 mile stretch along the western Australian coast that combined massive swells rebounding off sheer cliff faces, a headwind and no way out. Hoffmeister suffered brutal seasickness but toughed it out to become the second person ever to solo the route. She completed the circumnavigation in 332 days, paddling 8,565mi (13,790km) as she did so. Her aim was to beat the (only) previous time by Paul Caffyn who did the trip (assisted the whole way; Freya was assisted only the final 20% of the distance) in 360 days in 1980. Most intriguing though, is Glickman's treatment of Freya "the woman in black" Hoffmeister the person. Glickman's exasperation with Hoffmeister's almost total lack of interest in the history of her surroundings (she landed on Restoration Island - visited in 1789 by Captain Bligh on his epic journey after the mutiny on the Bounty), and her refusal to admit to or discuss any hint of fear ("What's the problem?") is obvious, but, by the end of the book it is clear that he has a whole-hearted admiration for Hoffmeister's achievements and an empathy with her somewhat unusual character.

If you are looking to read about a woman's spiritual transformation as she journeys solo around a continent nearly as large as her ego, then this book is not for you. It is not an Eat Pray Love-athon, but more so, a true and objective story about a woman who decided what she wanted to do, connected all the dots to do so, and then set out and proved to many nay-sayers that she could do it. And so she did. As a paddler, I knew something about Freya's trip through articles written by Joe Glickman, and from occasionally reading her blog entries. Because I found the blog almost painful and frequently annoying to read due to her flat and dull writing style, overabundance of emoticons, and self-adulation, I had already decided I didn't think this was the type of gal friend I would call up to go get a pedicure (although it appears she prefers to do this herself...well, of course she does!) Yet, I looked forward to the book's release, and when it arrived, I was ready to give it a go. From page one, Joe Glickman draws you into the Who, What, Where, and attempts to answer the Why of this most complicated, frustrating, and goal-driven woman. He does a swell job in describing the geography, environment (sharks and crocs, oh my), history, and culture of Australia. These

descriptions and stories provided visuals that had me realizing the significance of Freya's trek and the absurd mental strength needed to persevere day after day...Alone. (The chapter on the Zuytdorp Cliffs was most striking and my favorite). The recollections of the interactions between Freya and Oscar Chalupsky as well as others, and the author's own personal experiences such as his encounter with the blue bottles, were darn amusing. Do not doubt: Joe Glickman is a funny man.

I had been waiting excitedly waiting for the release of the book about Freya Hoffmeister's epic sea kayak paddle around Australia, and when I received the book, I devoured it faster than a Great White goes through a breakfast of Amity Island tourists. It's a spectacular read! There are two main aspects to the book, both of which I found fascinating and well explored by the author: The first - and obvious - aspect is the account of the expedition itself. The author, Glickman, renders the enormous challenges and portrays Freya's hair raising actions and life-or-death decisions with an acuity that is the result of his own impressive ocean kayaking experiences. He has participated in a half dozen ocean kayaking world championships, as well as performed long distance kayaking expeditions. In addition, he has talked extensively to everyone who attempted or completed the trip around Australia and is alive to talk about it. But the other, equally fascinating aspect, is the psyche of Freya Hoffmeister, the woman whose feats are without equal among current expedition kayakers, male or female. With men's domination over the kayaking world as absolute as King Luis XIV's reign over 17th century France, Freya's revolutionary feats of skill and endurance, combined with her cockiness, apparently made some male kayakers feel like Marie Antoinette on her way to the Guillotine, and they were not quiet about it. One of the most enjoyable aspects of the book is how you can identify with Freya and hope that she proves her male detractors wrong. She is unbelievably self-possessed and confident, yet equally skilled, competent and determined.

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