



Sharks On My Fin Tips

Simone Lipscomb

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Hoist the sails of a Windjammer schooner in the West Indies. Hear and feel the hurricane-downed flora of your childhood haunts break underfoot. Cave dive in Mexico and watch alcoholic monkeys raid leftovers in the tiki bar on St. Kitts. Swim as fast as you can away from the sharks that, as the title of this collection of exciting and insightful essays reveals, are circling your fin tips. Each chapter impacts the reader with stunning detail. Simone Lipscomb devours adventure the same way Thoreau indulged solitude as a means of connecting with the primal self within.

Simone Lipscomb explores in this book the fragile ecosystems of coral, the endangerment of marine species and the impact of hurricanes and development on precious wetlands. She does so in the context of personal adventure and encounter with the natural world.

On diving an old wreck: A huge sea turtle came out from under a large section of decking as I hovered over a timber. We met in the dark, silent ocean, the tip of her large beak only inches from the tip of my mask-encased nose.

On sharks: My legs dangled uselessly behind me, cramped into two balls of pain. I focused my attention and allowed myself to think only of the drift line even though I intuitively knew sharks were following closely behind me. It was perfect Zen practice.

On cave diving: The unique scene ahead of us exaggerated the sensation of floating weightless in space and the formations surrounding us became more pronounced. As divers, we were transformed into astronauts on a space walk through geologic time.

The essays in this collection educate, inspire and celebrate the creatures and ecosystems she encounters, be it in scuba gear, from the deck of a schooner, in a kayak or on a shore. The writing is lucid. The observations are stunning. In her writing she balances tales of external and internal discovery, informing readers of the fragility of coral reefs as much as the ease with which we can lose touch with our instinctual self. Readers can glean techniques for coping with fear, danger and risk, and embracing the value of reaching beyond their comfort zone.

From "Weather Wise"--

Growing up on the Alabama Gulf Coast exposed me to extremes in weather. The coastal humidity, Gulf of Mexico and tropical sun created afternoon thunderstorms that could humble the bravest sailor. But courage does not necessarily yield intelligent decisions. In the Deep South, children are taught to respect their elders and defer to the wisdom of grandparents; however, as a young adult nobody could tell me anything. If I decided to do something it would take more than a brick wall or my grandfather's sage advice to stop me.

One summer afternoon I wanted to launch our ski boat at Nolte Creek Marina and motor downriver to my grandparent's home on Week's Bay. My grandfather warned me that afternoon thunderstorms were building and it might be wise to wait until they passed. I saw heavy clouds in the distance over Mobile Bay but decided to launch the boat and spend some time alone on the water. In hindsight, I wish I had listened to my grandfather.

Women adventurers abound in this world, but not all are also blessed with the ability to convey in words the depths to which we go to retrieve and connect with our wild nature. In each of these essays, Lipscomb takes us into the beyond--the beyond of the natural realm and the beyond of the sacred self.

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