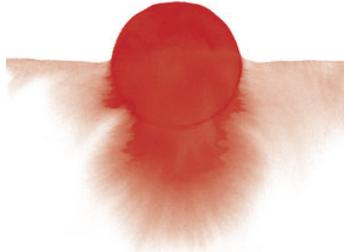


Facing the Wave

A Journey in the Wake of the Tsunami



Gretel Ehrlich

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD NOMINEE

"Unforgettable... A heartrending and unexpected marvel."
—San Francisco Chronicle

Gretel Ehrlich, *Facing the Wave: A Journey in the Wake of the Tsunami*. New York: Vintage, 2014. 240 pp. Paperback \$15.00. Epub \$11.99.

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck off the northeastern coast of Japan. The earthquake would be followed by a large and destructive tsunami, which additionally caused what is known as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Gretel Ehrlich chronicles the tragedy and following events in her work *Facing the Wave: A Journey in the Wake of the Tsunami*.

Ehrlich interweaves her story and the stories of others about the natural disaster. Her story is of a visitor, observer, and recorder in the aftermath. Others stories are of surviving the tragedy and dealing with the aftereffects. There are a host of players ranging from fishermen (including one who blogs) to volunteers to an aging geisha. Ehrlich first visits the area in June of 2011, three months after the initial event, and returns in September and December.

The book begins with the disquieting story of Kikuchi. Kikuchi, fisherman of Kamaishi, is driving shortly after the quake. He knows there will be a tsunami, and that he must to get his parents, but he sees his father heading to the seawall. Ehrlich's telling of Kikuchi's story is poignant. She uses her prose to deliver the scene, and she melds it with Kikuchi's words to provide more explanation. Kikuchi will lose his father, but survive the tsunami. Throughout the work there are stories such as Kikuchi's. The stories from June focus on experiences from that day in March, but they also correspond to life in the present and the challenges of the survivors, many of whom have lost everything. As Ehrlich returns in September and December, she revisits the survivors, and updates the reader on their plights.

Throughout the work Ehrlich gives details of the earthquake, the tsunami, and the nuclear plant disaster. She walks readers through the event via the lives of those impacted. Additionally, as she moves the reader forward, she offers insight into Japanese culture and the role it plays in the stories and in people's responses to the event. All of this combined is an overwhelmingly strong account of what the disaster meant for those who lived through it. In combining the personal stories, the descriptions of nature and culture, the role of government and volunteers, Ehrlich produces a work that illustrates how this tragedy is truly more—perhaps the ongoing story of nature and humanity. She writes, "The Wave was center and fringe at once, a totality, both destructive and beautiful." It is enlightening to see how the survivors take on the challenges delivered to them and how they deal with their post-tsunami circumstances.

Gretel Ehrlich is a masterful writer of nature and man's interaction with and relationship to nature. Ehrlich chronicles the natural disaster, but also, illuminates the resilience of humans. The book is decidedly, not only a very good read, but someday a re-read.

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