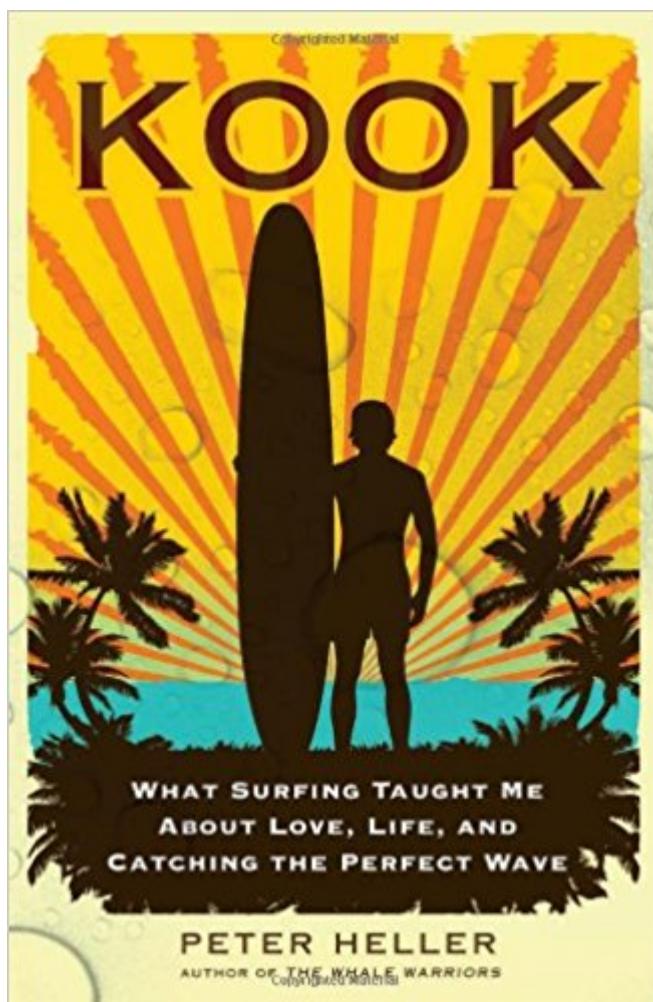


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# Kook: What Surfing Taught Me About Love, Life, And Catching The Perfect Wave



## Synopsis

With grit, poetry, and humor, Peter Heller, acclaimed author of *The Whale Warriors* recounts his remarkable journey of discovery—of surfing, an entirely new challenge; of the ocean’s beauty and power; of the strange surf subculture; of love; and, most of all, of how to seek adventure while crafting a meaningful life. Author of the *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Dog Stars* Winner of the National Outdoor Book Award for Literature Having resolved to master a big-hollow wave—that is, to go from kook (surfese for beginner) to shredder—in a single year, Heller travels from Southern California down the coast of Mexico in the company of his girlfriend and the eccentric surfers they meet. Exuberant and fearless, Heller explores the technique and science of surfing the secrets of its culture, and the environmental ravages to the stunning coastline he visits. As Heller plumbs the working of his own heart and finds joy in both love and surfing, he affords readers vivid insight into this fascinating world, with all of its perils and pleasures, its absurdity and wonder. Exhilarating, entertaining, and moving, *Kook* is a love story between a man and his surfboard, a man and his girlfriend, a not-so-old man and the sea.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Journalist Heller's gripping memoir of finding the value of life while shooting the curl off Baja starts off as a disappointing middle-aged man's lament about the lack of love and meaning in his life. Just back from an exhausting assignment in Tibet, he gets a phone call from an old friend in California who wants Heller to come out so they can take surfing lessons together. Reluctant at first to leave Denver and his girlfriend, Kim, he follows the call to this new adventure. At Huntington

Beach, Heller violates every rule of surfing etiquette, and other surfers vilify him as a kook, a beginning surfer. Initially, Heller is embarrassed, but he soon becomes so consumed by surfing that he brings Kim to California with him so that she can take lessons; soon, the two are traveling to various surfing locales in California and Mexico as Heller follows the waves. People admire surfers so much, he argues, because they have bowed to a force greater than themselves—“the wave”—and have transformed themselves into beings who can respond to such power with grace, humility, and beauty. By the end of this powerful memoir, Heller has learned that surfing is not simply about staying up on your board; it’s about love: of a woman, of living, of the sea. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"In this rich and gracefully written book, Heller's creative and artistic abilities are on full display. We follow along with him on an insightful, year-long quest as he grapples with the dual, ever capricious, challenges of love and the sea." —National Outdoor Book Award—“Breathtaking. . . . As Heller slips deeper and deeper into the surfing world, he teeters at the edge of obsession. . . . Over the course of this journey, Heller comes to understand the power of the waves, the value of the ocean and its suffering at the hands of man. Perhaps most important, he discovers his ability to commit, to love.—“Told with an honesty and self-deprecating sense of humor, Heller’s tale is as much about surfing as it is about his personal growth as an individual once he starts getting his glide on. With a finely trained ability to both have insight and share it, Heller connects the dots between the simple act of surfing, emotional health, personal redemption, and our duty to work as stewards of Mother Earth. Next time an employer, a parent, or a significant other questions why you surf or what the bigger meaning of so much time getting waterlogged actually adds up to, this book is the ideal answer to give them.”—Santa Barbara Independent—“The book may be about surfing, but the real subject here is obsession. How far is one man willing to push his body, mind, and relationship to achieve a singular goal? Though Peter Heller may end up catching a wave that is perfect, the life lessons along the way are even more powerful.”—Mark Obmascik, author of *Halfway to Heaven* and *The Big Year*—“Heller is a guy you would want to go on an adventure with: likeable, fallible, good-humored, given to near-fatal bouts of love—for the ocean, for his girl, for the perfect wave. What begins as a mid-life crisis evolves, in this engaged and engaging story, into a deeply impassioned stand on behalf of marine-life, and of all life. Kook makes the dangerously unhip suggestion that it is still possible to find meaning--even transcendence--in the ever diminishing natural world.”—Pam Houston, author of *Sight*

HoundÃ¢ ¸Ã“Heller takes us on a wild, unforgettable adventure with the poet's gift for capturing the quintessential in risking everything and the transformation that comes with it. This book is a funny, compelling exploration of love, surfing and the everyday, even when life proves as uncompromising as the wave.Ã¢ ¸Ã¢ ¸â •Rebecca Rowe, author of *Forbidden Cargo*"The author has a great feel for peopleÃ¢ ¸Ã| As a result, the reader gets to know a collection of fascinating characters: surf stars, expats, and environmentalists, to say nothing of the creatures of the seaÃ¢ ¸Ã|Mr. HellerÃ¢ ¸â„¢s colorful and informative paean to humility belongs on the bookshelves of kooks and surf gods alike." --The East Hampton Star

I loved this book. I read it once and enjoyed it, but then I read it again and really experienced it. Hearing about the travels, scenery and waves made me feel like I was in the van too. I could relate to Kim so much regarding the pre-surfing ritual and sessions and also the waiting, rushing husband. It was informative, sad and funny and any person beginning a water sport can relate.

Awesome book by a great writer. If you love Heller, you'll love this even if you have no interest in surfing, IMO.

A great read for anyone even the least bit interested in surfing. But I tend to take it with a grain of salt when the author described, maybe a month or so into surfing lessons, going out and yelling at locals and presumably catching waves (otherwise why would he be annoyed they took off on his waves) on his 6'4" shortboard, even if the board was "a little fat in the middle".

While the writing style is great and easy to read, I was expecting the content of the novel to be more philosophical and insightful rather than a simple travelogue of learning to surf in California/Mexico. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, Heller never really comes out and says what surfing actually taught him about love, life and catching the perfect the wave. These topics are present throughout the book and I suppose the reader can draw their own conclusions, however, it did not come full circle for me. Also, it felt as though learning to surf was and remained a work assignment, simply to write a book, rather than a spiritual personal journey.

Read *Barbarian Days* by William Finnegan for a much more satisfying session.

I have been surfing more then 40 years. The story catches the trials of learning to surf quite well,

with the added benefit of providing awareness of how our fragile ecosystem in the ocean is deteriorating. A good read and great info about the future of our oceans.

I do not surf...now I want to give it a try! Mr. Heller writes wonderfully...he also writes about man's devastation to our oceans and ocean life which was very difficult to read and is heartbreaking...all in all I enjoyed the book and would recommend.

While the message is uplifting and the writing is proficient, insightful, and at times interesting, there are things about this book that are just, well, "kooky." Some of the stories seem farfetched and unrealistic considering the author was learning how to surf while writing this book. For instance, I find it hard to believe that a beginning surfer could just paddle straight to the peak at a spot where there is an established pecking order and get called into waves by the main local at that spot. But perhaps that actually happened. "A" for effort though, kook.

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