



The Beach House

Helen McKenna

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Young journalist Jessica hopes to make it big with her coverage of the court case, but first she has to appease her editor and put a human interest spin on the situation. At first glance the five people she chooses to background have little in common – but it soon becomes apparent that staying at The Beach House has changed all of them in some way.

In telling the stories of Kate, Simone, Tom, Clare and Jack, Jessica too learns some important life lessons.

The Beach House Details

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The Blurb

“Nothing much happens in the small Queensland town of Sunset Point, which is just the way the locals like it. So, when an outsider with grand plans threatens to demolish an iconic local landmark and build a huge resort, the battle lines are drawn.

Young journalist Jessica hopes to make it big with her coverage of the course case, but first she has to appease her editor and put a human interest spin on the situation. At first glance the five people she chooses to background have little in common; but it soon becomes apparent that staying at The Beach House has changed all of them in some way.

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Summary

The Beach House is a poignant tale of a holiday rental in the little town of Sunset Point, Queensland, and the lessons learned by some of its vacationing visitors which allow their lives to change in a significant manner.

Jessica, a young journalist with aspirations of fame, is excited when she is assigned the story of the legal tussle between the small Queensland Town of Sunset Point and a developer with visions of building a resort which will include the demolition of The Beach House to accommodate his plans. Unfortunately, her editor is interested in her pursuing the human interest aspect by finding people who had once vacationed in The Beach House and learning what the house meant to them.

In so doing, Jessica meets Kate, Simone, Tom, Clare and Jack, along with some other lesser characters, who all stayed at the house between 1991 and 2003.

Kate, having trouble deciding what she'd like to study at Uni, takes some time out before exams and shares the house with her taciturn cousin Jane. The relationship between the two cousins has always been a troubled one to say the least, but after Jane skilfully attends to a friend's medical emergency, Kate comes to realise that her cousin isn't as bad as she seems and the mending of their relationship begins. Some shocking revelations by Jane about her childhood floor Kate in the process, and by the end of their stay, they have managed to find some common ground and help one other.

For Simone, mother of 3 teenaged children and widowed a year before their vacation, The Beach House and her son Matt's Uni friend, Liam, become beacons in her dark world and she begins the healing process.

Tom, a school teacher in country Queensland, is tasked by the principal to take three rebellious students on a school camp with a difference in the hope that the time away will allow the three misfits to reflect on their socially unacceptable behaviour. Unfortunately, unruly behaviour often covers up more serious problems and Tom is stunned to learn that one of these boys is living with a terrible secret that will tear your heart out.

Clare's story is actually quite a few stories in itself. When the accommodation organisers manage to erroneously book the house out as "shared" accommodation, they have no idea that they have deftly set in motion a series of events that will change the lives of not one person, but seven, including two small children who will finally be able to get to know the meaning of family.

Jack is the last to tell his story and we come to learn that he is the lawyer who takes on the case against the

developers. He, too, does not escape a lesson which only a vacation at The Beach House can deliver.

There is also Jim, one of the lifeguards at Sunset Point who, like a lighthouse beacon guiding ships safely away from danger, makes short appearances in most of the stories but who we soon realise has an uncanny underlying perceptiveness. Thanks to Jack's story, we finally learn a lot more about him and the lesson he needs to learn. If Jack is the backbone, then Jim is the thread who sews it all together.

My Thoughts

To get to the end of the book and discover an Epilogue absolutely delighted me. It's something we don't see very often anymore and I was extremely excited to continue getting to know the characters I had come to love, whilst at the same time giving the story a finality which so many modern stories lack.

I really loved *The Beach House*, hence the reason it has earned 5 Stars from me. Helen McKenna has created well-defined, human characters in whom she has skilfully captured the essence and depth of human emotion in tales of discovery, healing, hope, compassion and forgiveness and, even at my tender age of just under 40, I find it most invigorating to come away from a book that has taught me something.

A well-structured novel with nice short paragraphs, and an easy, flowing prose, these almost 5 novellas within this book are truly inspirational and I highly recommend it as a book everyone should read.

About the Author

Helen McKenna lives on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Queensland and has worked in banking, local government, learning support and as a biographer. *The Beach House* is *Helen's* first novel.

Suzanne says

Set in a small, coastal Queensland town, *The Beach House* tells the story of an old holiday house that is being threatened with demolition to make way for a new resort. A court battle is looming and a young journalist is assigned the story. However rather than chasing after the "big" headline, her editor first makes her cover the human interest angle and interview five people who have stayed there in the past. Thus their stories form the novel.

I knew I was going to enjoy this book right from the first scene. I grew up in a small town similar to the fictitious Sunset Point in Queensland where *The Beach House* is set. The words 'School of Arts Hall' immediately took me back to the small timber hall that was the epicentre of my home town. That same scene, describing a rowdy town meeting protesting the proposed development brought back vivid memories and drew me into the storyline.

As mentioned above, *The Beach House* is told in five parts – each of which is a separate character (three female and two male). Each is set in a different year (mainly the 1990s) so the stories do not initially overlap. (They do all tie up at the end though). However the house itself could almost be considered a sixth character, as you grow to understand why the people who have stayed there have such fond memories of it, and thus it is the thread that links all the stories together. There are also a couple of locals who appear in several stories and one in particular (Jim) who features in each story. I really enjoyed his character as he is a very typical Australian male. I think most of us would know at least a few Jim's.

As each story unfolds you begin to get to know the character and why they have come to *The Beach House*. I thought all the characters were well drawn. While I could identify with some better than others (Simone in

particular), I found elements in most of them that I could relate to. I really enjoyed the male characters (Tom in particular). The usual kind of themes are covered – love, loss, stress, grief, self-discovery – but not in an over the top kind of way. I enjoyed this mild, subtle approach, which still provided plenty of food for thought. As well as some drama and action scenes, there are plenty of light moments (especially in the Tom chapter as he battles being pranked by teenagers) and some humour sprinkled throughout. The dialogue is natural and identifiably Australian, (without being ocker). Those from Queensland will enjoy the local references.

The Beach House is not high literature, nor an action-packed thriller. Rather it is a simple story told well. The language is simple yet descriptive and the pace is good. It is a perfect holiday read, a good companion on a long plane trip or just a great story that you can really lose yourself in.

Olivia says

Having read a few reviews of this book, I was fairly sure that I was going to enjoy it and I wasn't disappointed. While I agree it is an 'easy' read, there is also some depth to each section/character in the story as well as a charm and simplicity that ultimately left me with a smile on my face when I finished it.

Told in five parts, The Beach House is the story of five individuals who all holiday in the same small town in Queensland and stay at the same beach house. The underpinning of the story is a court case, relating to the proposed demolition of the house – but this ends up being a minor part of the storyline (although still very important). Each person is changed in some way by their stay at The Beach House and that is why they are all campaigning to save it.

Each section varies a little in pace, but in general they all move along well. Although I wouldn't call it an 'action-packed' book, there are some pockets of faster pace that blend well with the overall easygoing feel of the book. Although I really enjoyed all the varying stories, I did relate more to some than others. I thought Simone's story in particular captured the reality of dealing with grief well and I liked the viewpoint of a male dealing with a broken heart (in Jack) as opposed to the usual female side of the story. As for my favourite character that would have to be Tom (mainly I think because he reminded me so much of my cousin (also Tom)). I liked the fact that there wasn't always a neat ending, but you know the character was moving towards it.

I thought the attention to detail in the setting of a beach town was great as was the movies/songs/technology of the 1990s (West Coast Cooler anyone??).

Finally the main theme I got from this book was the notion that past events always have an impact and need to be resolved before people can really move on. Along that same vein was also the idea that sometimes you learn life lessons in unexpected ways from unexpected people.

Brenda Cheers says

There is an historic beach house on a prime piece of real estate in a small Queensland town.

Developers are circling – they want the land for a resort. The townspeople don't want them to have it.

A young journalist is given the story to write from a human interest angle. She interviews a number of people who have been guests of the beach house. We are told their stories, and each one is complete in its own right. There are climaxes and resolutions.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was well written and Ms McKenna has an excellent command of language. The characters are well developed and the reader gets to know each one intimately. One of the stories, Clare 2000, touched me deeply.

The Epilogue, which contains the overall resolution, is satisfying.

I highly recommend The Beach House and have rated it 5 stars.

Mary Burke says

I LOVED it!! This is a really enjoyable book. It will make you laugh and make you cry, the characters are so well written that you genuinely care what happens to them and get totally involved in their stories. I was really sorry when each story ended and i had to leave the characters behind. Thankfully there were new characters to get to know in each new story. The style is an easy read but it is in no way predictable, i loved the twists in the stories that i never saw coming. I loved the epilogue that tied the story together and another twist! It's great because it tells you what happens to the characters after the main story ends. It is a real feel good story, the perfect antidote to the grey summer days of the British Summer. I loved the 90s references the attention to detail here is very well done. Having been to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland on holiday it brings back wonderful memories of blue skies, sunshine and sandy beaches. Everybody should make the journey to Sunshine Point you wont be disappointed. I cant recommend this book highly enough!!

Simone says

A developer wants to demolish an old beach house in Queensland - nothing too unusual about that these days. But the people of Sunset Point aren't going to let "their" beach house be torn down without a fight. Enter journalist Jessica, who is assigned the job of telling the stories of five people from different walks of life who have stayed in the house. These stories join together to form the novel The Beach House.

As a Queenslander I loved the setting and all the local references. Although a fictional town, there are many elements of Sunset Point that could be just about any small coastal town in Queensland or Australia for that matter. I thought these were captured really well.

I really enjoyed getting to know each different character and following their journey at different points in time. I think my favourite character would have to be Tom, but I did enjoy all the others as well. Each story was inspiring and there were some twists I didn't see coming.

A fairly simple but engaging story that had me captivated right until the end.

Helen McKenna says

Well, you've got to love your own book, right??

Wendy says

The Beach House is perfect book to take away and read on a beach holiday! Or to read anytime really.

Aussie author **Helen McKenna** has a gift for bringing her characters to life so that they become like real people who I would like to meet. They aren't all perfect and all have their own struggles and things to overcome in their lives.

Told within the main story are five stories that occur over a period of years and they are all brought together by the location - a beautiful beach house - and a handful of characters and story threads that weave their way through the stories until they come together at the end.

It is set in a fictional but somehow very familiar Queensland beach town, that could really be almost any small seaside town in Australia, and the characters and stories themselves are in essence universal.

I enjoyed *The Beach House* so much that I gave a copies to my mum and my closest friends - it makes for a great gift!

Eline says

Although it took me a while to read this book, I loved it! Helen McKenna wrote a story that doesn't get boring at all. I can't say it reads like a train, but I was always curious about the things that would happen next. I could really connect with the main characters in this story, though there were a lot of them. I didn't think I would be able to understand all the different characters and like them, but I did. The author has the great ability to describe characters in a "real" way. You seem to know them. You almost have the feeling you're staying in the beach house with them and that's what I loved so much about this book. If you're trying to get away from everyday life or stress, this is a great book to read. Also in other circumstances I really recommend it.

In this book Helen McKenna tells us the story about a beautiful but simple building on the beach of Sunset Point, Queensland. Not providing internet, television or anything else modern people can't miss, it doesn't seem to be much of an attractive place to spend your holidays. We couldn't be more mistaken! The beach house turns out to be a great place to get to know yourself and the people around you a bit better. It seems to show the good there is in everybody, to heal wounds, to heal bonds that are broken, to make new bonds,... In fact this house turned out to be a little bit of a main character too.

We "meet" the house when it's almost too late to get to know it. A big firm wants to place it somewhere else because they need the place on the beach to build huge resorts. Of course the people of Sunset Point don't like this idea and don't want their beach house to disappear. When a newspaper wants to write a story about the house, everybody is happy to participate. Just like all the people who once stayed at the house, they want to help in every way they can to save it.

Instead of describing a boring discussion in court, Helen McKenna gives us five stories about different people staying at the house and somehow becoming better of it. These five people don't have a thing in common except for one major thing that changed their lives: they stayed at the most special house in Australia.

At first I wanted to give this book 4 stars, but I just couldn't because the story is so good and well written. I still believe the story could "move on" a little faster (it took me a month to read this book), but that didn't make me appreciate the book less. I believe Helen should get a lot of praise and I hope her book will do well!

Tracey Jago says

This book is filled with wonderful stories of people who have spent time staying at The Beach House. They have nothing in common bar the house itself. One thing that happens during each stay at The Beach House is life changing.

It's beautifully written and inspiring.

At first it looked like a huge story but it's not, it's divided into sections where each of the five tell their story of their stay at The Beach House. It started off from Kate's stay in 1994 to Jack's stay in 2003.

There is great diversity throughout each story.

Jim Stewart is a life guard at Sunset Point and appears in each story. In Jack's story Jim appears more and we learn a lot about Jim and his life at Sunset Point.

Nene Davies says

The Beach House is a delightful book. I loved the way that the parts, though connected, all stood proudly as a story in their own right. The characters in each tale were believable people, dealing with problems that either we've wrestled with ourselves, or we know somebody who has - or at the very least, we can imagine happening in life. People whose lives are off-track in one way or another, and the thing that pulls them all together is the Beach House itself. I'd love to visit Sunset Point and stay at the Beach House. Heck - I'd love to live there permanently! Sunset Point is a proper community, where people care and as you smuggle your way into the Beach House in each character's suitcase, you'll find yourself caring about the place and its people too. Immerse yourself in The Beach House - I think you're going to love it.

Clare says

I loved this book! For a start I loved the fact that it was set in Queensland (Australia) as there are so few books set there and I also loved the fact that parts of it were set in the 1990s. It is a bit of a different kind of novel in that there are five stories within the book each featuring a different character. But they are all set at the same place "The Beach House" in the small town of Sunset Point. Each of these stories could have almost been a novel in themselves, but they are more like a novella. And the stories do all connect at the beginning and end, but I won't give that away here.

Each character ends up at The Beach House for a different reason, and during their stay there they have an experience that changes them in some way. Some of the stories have some sadness in them, but overall the feeling of the book is an uplifting one as you get to know each character and empathise with them (as well as laugh).

I found the simple writing style really refreshing, but it was also descriptive enough to convey the town and the house and the beach of course. I also liked the fact that it was an Australian book not trying to be anything other than that. I loved the references to different places (ie Brisbane) and the songs, movies etc

from the 1990s.

Overall it was a great read and The Beach House is a book I will definitely keep and read again.

Suzie says

I'm a bit reluctant to try new authors and then when it is a first novel, I'm always a bit dubious. But I got a nice surprise when I read The Beach House. Right from the start I could tell that I was going to enjoy it and that it would be an easy, entertaining read.

The basic storyline is about a developer who wants to buy some prime beachfront land in Queensland. The only problem is that there is an old holiday house already there. He is annoyed when the locals protest but he really wants the land and takes the matter to court. Then a newspaper decides to cover the story and that's when the different characters are introduced.

I haven't read many novels where there are different characters and separate stories that make up the whole book. But I found it easy to follow and because they are set in the same place, you get a sense of continuity. The characters are all quite different, but they are all pretty normal people. There is nothing too unusual in there. The stories are all about the same length, but some have more minor characters than others.

I thought the description of the setting was great - you definitely got the beachy feel and could really picture the beach, the house and the town.

There are a couple of emotional scenes throughout, but on the whole it is a feel-good kind of book. I liked how it wasn't always a perfect, happy ending but you got the feeling that things would work out OK in the end.

A really enjoyable book, well worth a read.

Alice says

Like my favourite Maeve Binchy book, (Evening Class), The Beach House is a group of different stories that have been woven together to form a novel. I loved exploring each different character and their individual journey in staying at The Beach House. But I also loved the way all the characters were threaded together at the end. All the characters had an impact on me in some way. There were also a couple of little twists that I didn't see coming.

I also loved the setting. Queensland is one of my favourite places.

A really heartwarming book that I couldn't put down.

Sharon says

(E-book was gifted for honest review)

The Beach House, a beautifully written tale about people power and how the simple things in life still matter. Jessica, an up and coming journalist is asked to do a story about a beach house in the sleepy Queensland beach side town Sunset Point that is being threatened by development. What starts out as a means of making a big name for herself turns out to be a story that touches her heart and makes her realise that the simple life is often the best.

We get to know the history of the beach house through five stories shared by the people that had spent some time there. Kate, Simone, Tom, Clare and Jack all stay at the beach house over the years. At first, each one wonders why they had decided to isolate themselves in a house with no television, mobiles or internet allowed, but by the time their holiday is over their lives are dramatically changed. Even though all the people that stayed at the beach house are unrelated and have never met each other before, they all come together to save the wonderful house that has taught them so much and opened their eyes to what is possible when people care deeply.

The author writes in a way that is easy for the reader to relate to each character on an emotional level, to the point where I was moved to tears and laughter on several occasions. Whilst I enjoyed reading the stories of all the people that stayed at the beach house, I would have to say that my favourite was Clare. I loved how a group of strangers were thrown together and had to make the best of a bad situation.

If you love a feel good story with interesting characters and storyline, then this is definitely a book to take a look at. I will most definitely be reading this again in the future.
