



Young Woman and the Sea: How Trudy Ederle Conquered the English Channel and Inspired the World

Glenn Stout

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Currently set up and under development at Paramount Pictures as a major motion picture. ETA 2020?

In 1926, before skirt lengths inched above the knee and before anyone was ready to accept that a woman could test herself physically, a plucky American teenager named Trudy Ederle captured the imagination of the world when she became the first woman to swim the English Channel. It was, and still is, a feat more incredible and uncommon than scaling Mount Everest. Upon her return to the United States, "Trudy of America" became the most famous woman in the world. And just as quickly, she disappeared from the public eye.

Set against the backdrop of the roaring 1920s, *Young Woman and the Sea* is the dramatic and inspiring story of Ederle's pursuit of a goal no one believed possible, and the price she paid. The moment Trudy set foot on land, triumphant, she had shattered centuries of stereotypes and opened doors for generations of women to come. A truly magnetic and often misunderstood character whose story is largely forgotten, Trudy Ederle comes alive in these pages through Glenn Stout's exhaustive new research.

Young Woman and the Sea: How Trudy Ederle Conquered the English Channel and Inspired the World Details

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From Reader Review Young Woman and the Sea: How Trudy Ederle Conquered the English Channel and Inspired the World for online ebook

Mary says

I think non-fiction, despite being my very favorite genre, either falls into two categories. 1. the best reading of all time or 2. an abysmal failure and mind numbingly boring. That being said this book falls largely in the mediocre category for me. At times I was invested and intrigued and other times I was overwhelmed with more useless information than I wanted to deal with.

The book is about the first woman to swim the English channel. Now having said this I used to swim on the swim team, this is a challenge I have considered for my bucket list, and I am largely fascinated with the Channel's crazy history. So when I was in a diluge of monotony I had no idea how those less interested in the sport/history were even managing to plow through.

Overall though I did like it. Just felt some of the story could have been condensed.

Susan (aka Just My Op) says

Trudy Ederle was the first woman to swim the English Channel, and this is her story. However, it is much more than that. It is also the story, to a lesser degree, of the English Channel, of the acceptance of women athletes, of the acceptance of swimming in general and especially for women. The story opens with a tragedy on the East River. A pleasure boat carrying families caught fire and many died because they didn't know how to swim. I didn't realize that even in the early 20th century, swimming for women was taboo, considered immoral. This tragedy started a movement to teach swimming, if only for safety.

Trudy must have been a remarkable young lady. She was strong and athletic, accomplishing what most other swimmers would never be able to do, but she was also very close to her family and a little naive. She was sometimes taken advantage of. She was somewhat shy and also had a hearing impairment that made her uncomfortable in crowds, detrimental to her when she became well known. The story even includes a mystery about her first attempt at crossing the channel. The book was, for the most part, well written, and includes some great photographs. For my taste, there was occasionally a little too much detail, especially about individual swimming events and times. And I think that the title, *Young Woman and the Sea*, doesn't really do justice to the story even though it is probably a take on Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Overall, the book was both informative and entertaining.

(The copy I reviewed was an ARC sent to me by a friend, and as such had quite a few typos and editing mistakes that I am assuming were corrected before the final edition was published.)

Beth says

My friend Alicia recommended this one, and as a history-lover, I thought I'd try it out. The story itself is a remarkable, inspiring one. Trudy Ederle was such a fantastic swimmer at all distances, and yet she still had

obstacles to overcome: social stigma (it was taboo for women to appear in bathing suits in public, and they simply weren't considered true athletes based on their gender), personal problems (she was mostly deaf, and this exacerbated her reticence toward the spotlight), and the Channel itself (which the author takes the time to cast as a very worthy opponent).

Yeah, I loved the way the author told the story. It simply wouldn't do for a book about swimming to be dry (haha; that's a pun), and Stout's engaging writing style made it feel like you were there in the action, from the very first sentence of each chapter. I loved the varying viewpoints he included, and especially the way he takes the reader inside Trudy's head as she spent her 14.5 hours in the English Channel. At times it felt too dramatic to be nonfiction, and I wondered how much was true -- but he includes several citations (even for Trudy's inner thoughts as she swam) on which he based his writing, and I'm satisfied with its authenticity.

I recommended this book to my mom, who is both an avid reader and swimmer, and it's her new favorite. I can see why -- Trudy Ederle was a fascinating character with a remarkable accomplishment that shaped the history of women's sports -- even women's history in general. She is someone whose story deserves to be told to our generation -- and I'm grateful for the author for doing so. An engaging, enlightening, inspiring read!

Gwendelyn Wensloff says

As I found out from Young Woman and that Sea written by Glenn Stout, Trudy Ederle is a huge, usually unrecognized, piece of swimming history.

She created the bikini because it was more comfortable and she felt she swam faster in one with less drag! Being a water oriented person, I absolutely loved this book. I was especially interested in the sad sub-stories that were nicely intervaled throughout Trudy's story. Like the one about the ship carrying hundreds of people caught fire, hundreds of men, women, and children died less than 10 feet from shore, but none could get there because none knew how to swim. This is a truly fascinating piece of literature.

Susan says

"The Young Woman and the Sea: How Trudy Ederle Conquered the English Channel and Inspired the World" is the story of Trudy Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel - but it's more than that.

First, a lot of history on swimming. I didn't realize that it's only been in the past 90 years or so that women were taught to swim. For much of Europe's history, swimming was thought to be ungainly and not something proper folks did. Even when men began swimming, it certainly wasn't a sport for women - for one thing, the costume! Horrors! The author recounts incidents in the early 1900s where women were arrested for public nudity while wearing bathing suits on beaches. This fear of women exposing themselves was behind much of the reluctance to see women swimming.

Trudy and her sisters were in on the beginnings of women's swimming in the US, and for Trudy the water truly felt like home, partially because she was nearly deaf from a childhood bout with measles.

All kinds of interesting history are recounted - men were the first to swim the English channel, often basically naked. It took quite a bit longer for a woman to do it, no doubt in large part due to the fact that many were trying to do it in cumbersome wool "swim dresses." You'll also learn why the English Channel is so difficult to swim: tides, currents, and 60-degree water all play roles.

This is a fascinating tale of determination - "girl power" without all the PC feminist hype that abounds today. Highly recommended!

Megan says

Trudy Ederle's place in history is often overlooked.

I come from a family of open-water swimmers. I have friends who have done solo crossings, and I myself participated in a successful relay swim across the Channel in 2007. And yet, I only vaguely knew about Trudy Ederle. My dad has long asserted that Lynne Cox (who, in 1972, finally displaced Trudy as the youngest female swimmer to make the crossing) was the one who revolutionized open-water swimming by using the Australian Crawl rather than the Trudgeon. My mom regularly confuses Ederle with Florence Chadwick, who set a speed record in 1953. In many ways, the post-Crossing section of this book reads like a tragedy -- explaining how the recipient of America's first ticker-tape parade quickly lost any chance to capitalize on her hard work, and died mostly-forgotten.

But most of this book is a celebration. A celebration of an era where women started to come into their own, a sport came into its own, and the promise of possibility was so thick in the air that you could taste it. The author has adopted in Ederle not just a hero, but a symbol -- a girl who swam the Channel freestyle, and revolutionized a sport (prevailing wisdom at the time was that "Australian Crawl" was too taxing of a stroke for more than a few hundred yards; these days, the only reason someone would complete an open-water swim by some other method is for the publicity possibilities). Her pluck, strength, and talent shine in those passages, and the excitement that drives the writing is quite intoxicating.

This is an extremely well-researched work; appreciation of historical context aside, I loved the interesting tidbits that Stout peppered throughout -- for example, Johnny Weissmuller was one of the few swimmers during the early 20s who was perhaps more unbeatable than Ederle (the two never went head to head because of prevailing social mores at the time, but they often headlined at the same swim meets)...a few chapters later, while detailing their trip to the 1924 Paris Olympics, you discover that the reason that name sounds so familiar is that Weissmuller later starred as Tarzan in the classic films. Who'd have known? The reader encounters historical context, social commentary, and interesting trivia page after page after page. Even when the tale veers away from Ederle herself (as it often does, in the earlier, context-setting, chapters) the information being shared is so intriguing that you want to keep reading.

As a participant in the sport that Ederle revolutionized, I really appreciated this book. But I also enjoyed it as a feminist, a history buff, and a person who just likes a tightly-plotted, fast-paced read. It was all of these things, and worth a look.

Stephanie says

I really enjoyed this book. Trudy Ederle is an inspiration-- being the first woman to swim the English Channel and faster than any man before her. I loved her attitude and determination. I enjoyed seeing her accomplishment in the context of the world around her and what was going on for women, swimming, and politics.

The opening of the book is gripping with the Slocum tragedy and really sets the stage for Trudy's story. The author switches back and forth between Trudy and general swimming history in the first part of the book. While some may find the history of swimming to be lengthy and distracting, I liked it.

While Trudy didn't want to be pitied or have her story seen as sad, it was pretty impossible to do so. I wish the author had done more to highlight her life achievements after swimming the channel.

Emilie says

I was fascinated by the story behind this book. I was mostly unaware of this tale and the writing was really excellent, drawing the reading in as if it were good fiction instead of a sports novel. Someone who is very interested in the sport of swimming might like each and every chapter, but I found about half of the chapters in the first half of the book to be filled with too much (seemingly unnecessary) information for me. Entire chapters were dedicated to the weather, wind patterns and tides of the English Channel. As well as detailed accounts of each and every attempt made to swim it in history up until (and a few after) Trudy's successful swim.

Overall a really excellent book that made me think about my role as a woman in my lifetime and shifting roles and expectations throughout recent history.

Kelley says

Book read in conjunction with Book Discussion Group and Skype with the author

I had never heard of Trudy Ederle before reading this biography; after finishing it, I feel like I really know who she was. This biography was so well-written and well researched that Trudy came to life for me. Trudy Ederle was truly a pioneer in women's sports.

I appreciated the history given in women swimming at all. I had never heard of the steamship, "General Slocum" which burned in the East River. Most of the victims were women who simply did not know how to swim. That disaster took the largest amount of lives in New York until September 11. Because of that disaster, women would finally begin to learn to swim.

Trudy, however, loved the water. She spent hours in the ocean with her sisters learning to swim. She joined the Women's Swimming Association in New York and trained for the Olympics. When that didn't go as she had hoped, she set her sights on the English Channel.

Mr. Stout certainly brought Trudy Ederly into the daylight. I can see her swimming and smiling in my mind's eye. When told she should stop swimming, her answer was, "What for?" Many women who came after her asked their detractors the same question--Why should I stop?

Alicia says

This book was amazing. Interesting history, woman's lib, robbed childhoods, this book has it all. Did you know that Trudy Ederle invented the bikini 20 years before French engineer Louis Réard did it in 1946? She actually swam the Channel in one because she found that it had less drag than any other suits she tried.

Also, did you know that Native Americans invented the crawl, or freestyle stroke? For years the breaststroke or sidestroke was thought to be superior to any other swim stroke until the Americans showed up at the Olympics and blew everyone out of the water. But this book talks about how it was discovered by an artist and displayed to the world at the world's fair (If I'm remembering correctly)

And while all that is awesome and interesting, this book is about Trudy. A New York native of German descent who fell in love with the water on the Jersey shore. About the struggle of women to be treated as equals. About this history of swimming. About the fear of water. About the geological makeup of the Channel itself. About the rights of athletes. This book honestly is so amazing and will suck you in within the first few pages. I'm not kidding. If that story about the fire in the ship off Long Island doesn't get you, I don't know what will.

I really want some of to read this so we can talk about it! You will not believe what happens at the Olympics in 1924. And you will NOT believe what happened the first time she tried to swim the channel. But ultimately this is a story about one woman's triumph and how she succeeded when everyone tried to tell her to get out of the water. LITERALLY. Oh, not only did she succeed, she SMASHED the record. A woman. An American Woman. Oh, and did I mention she was 19? Yeah, she was a teenager.

This is the Seabiscuit of 2009. I'll go on record as stating that right now. Makes me happy to be a swimmer. And by the way, it's ok to be chubby if you are a channel swimmer. Maybe I should look into it?

Danica says

More like 3.5 stars. There were some really interesting facts in this book, and being a competitive swimmer in my past life, much of this story fascinated me. My biggest problem was with typos every few pages, and I guess the author's style of writing didn't grip me. My favorite was once she started her successful attempt at the crossing and on. I felt the writing got better at that point. Really interesting to learn about how taboo swimming for women was at the turn of the century - I really had no idea!

K Baker says

loved it! I think I will reread it. And I did sent a note to the author to say: THANKS!

...one chapter is her story, the next is about the science of it all or the history of swimming or the bigger picture, etc. I was so sad that the young woman seemed to struggle so much in her life. I was actually a bit jealous of her youth... going to the water each summer (but I had a swimming pass one summer...) I guess I got to a point where I did see the bitter with the sweet and realized I do like my own life better, even if I have always been to shy to really let my light peek far beyond the bushel that seems to cover it while one is busy with responsibilities...

CJ says

At first I was a little irritated with Stout because he moved back and forth between telling Ederle's story and seemingly telling the stories of all the other swimmers. I quickly realized that he was setting the stage - it's impossible to understand someone's life story without understanding the time/space in which she lived.

I fell in love with Trudy Ederle and her drive to swim. Even though I knew she was going to make it, I found myself on pins and needles through those chapters. An inspiring story and one well worth reading.

Jennifer says

Rather enjoyed this one, though I am definitely not a swimmer. Stout does an excellent job of keeping the relevant background details (history of swimming, geological aspects of the English Channel, various asides) brief, providing just enough information. The focus on Trudy and the people in her swimming life is at the heart of the book, and where a reader's interest lies.

Even with an understanding of the culture of the early 20th Century, I was amazed (and sometimes amused) by the rather rigid, sexist views of the time. This is an excellent tale of a young woman who just wanted to swim, and was able to capitalize on the changes occurring in society that would have doomed her ambitions even 10 years earlier. A great read - although it is sad that her name and accomplishments are not better known.

Diane says

My parents were always bragging about how their high school was the first in the state to have a swimming pool, but I never understood the significance of this part of their and my PE program until reading this book. The historical nature of it really held me spellbound, as it explained how swimming stroke, and lessons evolved. Incredible! When I was a child, everyone I knew knew how to swim. It was a given. But just two generations ago, it was not. Wow! How the world changes and even simple things are taken for granted. Yes, indoor plumbing, electricity, cars, telephones, 'wireless', antibiotics - heck, plain soap and water washing, but I had never included swimming on that list until now.
