



Come to the Edge

Christina Haag

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An elegy to first love, a lost New York, and a young man who led his life with surprising and abundant grace

When Christina Haag was growing up on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, John F. Kennedy, Jr., was just one of the boys in her circle of prep school friends, a skinny kid who lived with his mother and sister on Fifth Avenue and who happened to have a Secret Service detail following him at a discreet distance at all times. A decade later, after they had both graduated from Brown University and were living in New York City, Christina and John were cast in an off-Broadway play together. It was then that John confessed his long-standing crush on her, and they embarked on a five-year love affair. Glamorous and often in the public eye, but also passionate and deeply intimate, their relationship was transformative for both of them. With exquisite prose, Haag paints a portrait of a young man with an enormous capacity for love, and an adventurous spirit that drove him to live life to its fullest.

A haunting book, *Come to the Edge* is a lasting evocation of a time and a place—of the indelible sting of the loss of young love, and of the people who shape you and remain with you, whether in person or in spirit. It is about being young and full of hope, with all the potential of your life as yet unfulfilled, and of coming of age at a moment in New York's history when the city at once held danger, magic, and endless possibilities for self-discovery.

Rarely has a love story been told so beautifully.

Come to the Edge Details

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From Reader Review Come to the Edge for online ebook

Loular says

Absolutely gorgeous memoir by Christina Haag about her once in a life-time love affair with one of America's royal family, JFK Jr.

It is expertly, carefully crafted to focus on the way a love like that can mysteriously carry on through the years, across many challenges and become the kind of romantic narrative which are both complex, profound, maddening, yet spiritually impossible to walk away from. It's a beautiful tale of growing up in NYC in the 80's and life as a working actress in that time. It's an expertly crafted narrative that focuses on the love binding them along with wonderful detail from the surrounding lives they lead. Never once does it digress into any cheap tell all: This is a wonderful, heartbreakingly romantic memoir I found simply impossible to put down, nor stop think about long after having finished it. I cannot recommend it highly enough. Christina Haag: Great actress, great writer and noble soul.

Book Riot Community says

Sleepily browsing my Audible library on the plane home for Christmas, I clicked on one of my very favourites – the author's tender memoir of her time with John Kennedy Jr, growing up in one another's orbit in NYC, sharing a house at Brown, and then finally being a couple and losing each other. It's been a long time since I've read it, and it's every bit as good as I remember. The audio is wonderful – Christina Haag reads it with emotion but without ever overdoing it. This book is romantic and heartbreakingly evocative, with a wonderful sense of place and beautifully crafted writing. It's perfect for reading by the fire or listening to while dozing off jet lag – in other words, holidays are a great time to read or re-read this one.

— Claire Handscombe

from The Best Books We Read In December: <http://bookriot.com/2015/12/23/riot-reviews-best-books-read-december/>

Mary Miller says

Never in recent memory has a story brought me such a strong sense of time and place as Christina Haag's Come to the Edge.

I bought the book in anticipation of learning things I hadn't known about John Kennedy Jr., which I absolutely did. What I didn't expect was to connect so much with Christina's story- from her Sacred Heart schooling to her close bond with her father; her college days as a thoughtful, free spirit; and the years following when she and John finally became a couple and came of age together in New York. NYC itself is another character in the book, and although I've never visited, thanks to Christina's loving and unsparing descriptions I have such a vivid picture of the intriguing, fun, colorful place it was in the 70s and 80s. Her recounting of other places (Cumberland Island, the Kennedy family's homes, Brown University in their college days, even the restaurants & bars they frequented) are equally vivid and inspire one to visit them all. Christina's writing is poetic, honest, and clear- the kind of writing that begs to be read aloud, underlined, earmarked, re-read. After finishing Come To The Edge, I can truly say that I am much more familiar with

John Kennedy as a person, which feels like a gift. My only regret is that there aren't more chapters in the special relationship of this very special couple. But then, in the words of Heraclitus, "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." Instead it stays crystallized in the past- a tribute to what was, and what could have been- much like my own story, and so many other people's. Thank you, Christina, for sharing your story with the world- and for all the ways in which it helped me reflect upon my own.

George Cleveland says

OK, so this is not the "kind" of book that I would normally pick up for myself. My prejudice is that a woman writing about her relationship with a man is a "girl book". Nevermind that I might make a much needed discovery about what makes a relationship work, much less thrive.

Add to that another prejudice towards books about Illuminated Celebrities. Not something that perks me up. And with "Come to the Edge", I "know" the ending: she doesn't get the guy.

All my prejudices were seriously tempered when I heard Christina Haag talk about her memoir and then was fortunate enough to spend some time with her over a surreal couple of days.

This is SO *NOT* another tale of American royalty. Yes, that element is there because they happen to be part of the story. And there is a building poignancy because we know what eventually is going to happen.

I think that with Christina's hand, this book would have impact if it was about her relationship with Joe Blow who happened to be a wild and crazy guy.

Have I learned more about women and relationships with them as a result of reading this book? Maybe. Time will hopefully bear that out.

This is a tale of a smart man and a smart woman who have a really "good" love. I'm pretty sure thoughtful women will appreciate this firm but tender memoir. And guys...it's kind of fun so give it a rip.

Michelle says

3.5 stars. Oh, JFK Jr. why do you still fascinate me more than a decade later? Basically this book is a love story told by John's college/twenties girlfriend Christina Haag. That this girlfriend is now in her 50s is somewhat disconcerting. But that's neither here nor there. The memoir starts out extremely slow, to the point I thought "this is the most boring book about the Kennedys ever written." The first few parts are about the author's early, privileged, easy days as a young girl in Manhattan. I realize it's the context for her bigger story (and where she first encounters John) but there's no drama, no intrigue and does not make for interesting reading (nor would my teenage years). However, once I reached the meat of the story, I found their romance surprisingly poignant and beautifully drawn. Honestly I was skeptical of this memoir, of her intentions, of how close they really were. But the writer won me over. I was right there with her through the ups and downs and then the relationship's end. I got teary-eyed more than a few times and my heart broke for her.

The writing itself is quite lovely. My favorite part is when she says marriage is an ongoing conversation and romance is something else entirely. Romance comes from the French word for story and thus, by definition, has a beginning, middle, and end. (Instant tears). Also, I loved the end of the book when she is looking at Navajo pottery in the Southwest and a spirited, spinning, happy little girl draws her attention. I don't want to ruin the review with spoilers but it was a very special part of the story.

It's worth noting the author never married. Plenty of people never marry and plenty of people never want to. But one can't help but wonder if her relationship with John was too present in future relationships. I read an interview with the author where she says they didn't work out because of timing (or some such thing) and at the time I thought "yeah, right" but it really does come across that way. I found myself gravely disappointed that it didn't work out. I would've loved to hear JFK Jr.'s take on it.

I wish the author delved more into their relationship after they broke up (if there was one) and how she felt when he did finally marry. Especially considering Cumberland Island was "her" place and, eventually, "their" place and then he married Carolyn Bessette there. Ouch. That had to have hurt. Also, oddly enough, I didn't feel like I knew the author herself all that well. Why did the most sought-after man in America love her so much? I suppose that's hard to address when you're writing about yourself, versus a fictional romance. All in, though, when stripped of the things that didn't work as well for me, this book is, at its heart, a moving, bittersweet love story.

Jana says

When I was a child I came across this article about Romy Schneider. In 1959, she was 20 years old and met Alain Delon, 24, while filming a movie called Christine. They were together for 5 years. She never recovered after their love affair but they managed to remain friends until the end. She died in Paris in 1982. Her heart stopped after she took the combination of pain killers and alcohol, not long after her teenage son died in a strange accident, puncturing his femoral artery after slipping while climbing a spiked fence. Alain arranged for her son to be buried alongside her. He placed a piece of paper with the following words on her tomb: "You were never so beautiful. You know, I learnt some German for you: "Ich liebe dich, meine Liebe."

Some loves are like this. And we all have a chance to experience love like this; it is magnificent and out of this world. The only thing about it is that it doesn't last as it can't. It has to become a story, "come back to me" dream at 4 o'clock in the morning, a wish for that person to be somewhere near, just the presence somewhere in the world, to know that he is breathing. And it would be enough.

It is not its path. Its is to conjure the happiness of a moment. Its road is inevitable. And this love hurts the most since a great loss is ahead. The absence of physical, the acknowledgement of the biggest lesson ahead: to let go, forgive and try to move on. To silently surrender your sorrow to grace and to learn to handle it, to make room for this never ending hollowness that a true and deceased love has in its core. The spell, the

heartache, the pull, the fact that you will never be unwounded again. That you will never love like this anymore. It is impossible.

We are made of learning from our experiences so second time around doesn't stand a chance to this beauty. Love is always possible and it has to be found again, but it will never burn this mikado orange red.

Some loves are like this.

John F. Kennedy Jr. and Christina Haag were as well together for 5 years, and during the time when they were starting to part away and the love was slowly turning into shadowing incandescence John John said this to her: "You've always been my compass. I would be lost without you. I think of the time ahead and it is like a dessert." I said nothing. I closed my eyes and held him. He had imagined it, the desert, but I hadn't. I couldn't."

He compared her to a E.E. Cumming's poem.

"somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclose me
though i have closed myself as fingers
you open always petal by petal myself as spring opens
(touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending,

nothing we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility; whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain has such small hands"

Christina Haag met John when they were 14 years old, but not until they were both 25, ex Brown College students, ex roommates and best friends did they start their love story that ended beginning of the 1990. When she started dating him, one of her friends told her to be careful. A wise advice to give anybody let alone a person who is falling in love with a Kennedy.

Just like Pat Conroy writes love letters to South Carolina in his books, Christina Haag gave her vision of the NYC during the 70s and 80s. It is really deeply sweet and melancholic place. I have to be little cynical and say a perfect place to grow up for mostly rich white Catholics but still, it is not my prerogative to judge it,

but just to observe it, since it is her world which she knows the best as she longingly described the vanished time.

But the book alone is really told in a completely different manner than I thought it would be. It is elegant and it's intimate, and I love places, books, poetry, stories references. Christina Haag wrote journals and diaries her whole life so she had a lot of details but there is the unspoken/unwritten side of this book too. She knows a lot more than it is between the covers, which is of course normal since it is her life and you cannot simply put all the words in, but this is not what I mean. She told their story in a very detailed way but she kept a lot of memories to herself: this is not a tell-all.

This way she wanted to protect his personality and still place him in the world; this loving persona - clutched by family, society and business demands but tattoo him too as humble, real, soft and powerful man as he as well was. They had a very gentle, down to earth yet palpable and rich romance since they have previously been good friends and it was an outdoor adventurous life she had with him, so I understand why she wrote this memoir. I don't see it as a chance to earn the money, but because she too lost him in more than one way, she needed him somehow alive. She managed to do this with her poetical style of writing and with the need to give his soul a place among the human senses.

It is a vulnerable, pure and honest memoir about growing up. Initiations, rituals, bridges...that lead us to go through fire, as each one has to face. It is what drives us, makes us who we are, confuses in many ways. John F. Kennedy and Christina Haag took the risk, fell in love and changed themselves to become better people. They didn't last but they had found each other in the time they needed each other the most. They were instinctual, genuine and for me as a reader, utterly heartbreaking lovers. And in the end, just like she quoted Thornton Wilder, "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning."

Gentle read with beautiful prose, written to describe one time long gone, one man long gone and one truly tender and beautiful love which with this memoir endured its end.

Han says

This memoir is possibly the best book I've read this year. I loved EVERYTHING about it, and I have zero complaints. Haag's writing is both eloquent and honest. She does an incredible job of showing, rather than telling, especially when it comes to explaining the simple, yet complicated nature of her relationship with JFK Jr. However, I may be slightly biased, as I appreciate any story set in 1970's/1980's New York. (What I would give to have been there...)

Kate Childs says

This book is captivating. I stayed up until 1:30 AM finishing it last night because I couldn't bear to put it down, and woke up this morning with a pounding headache because I fell asleep crying after finally reaching

the last page. **COME TO THE EDGE** is beautifully written, universal in nature, and tinged with a bittersweetness because you know how it all ends. Those searching for salaciousness in the pages of **COME TO THE EDGE** won't find it. Instead they'll find one of the most achingly true love stories—a story full of adventure, romance, hope—and you'll immediately compare it to your own stories and find a common ground with author Christina Haag. She's an actor by craft, but **COME TO THE EDGE** proves that she's also a talented writer.

Jayne Martin says

A book that touched my heart... and shall remain forever imprinted there. With writing as intricate and exquisite as finely-woven lace, Ms. Haag weaves a powerful story of a great and passionate love with a figure whose life was chronicled endlessly from the day he was born and yet remained a mystery to most of us long after his tragic death. The book succeeds on many levels: On a personal note, like so many of my generation who also fell in love with the three-year-old John-John, watched him grow, and invested in him the hopes and dreams that we'd also invested in his father and his uncle, Haag's generous telling their personal relationship for me, at least, finally lays bare the man and the mystery that was John F. Kennedy, Jr. I could never understand why he chose to go up in that plane on that fateful day. Now, although still sadly, it makes perfect sense. As a love story, one could not possibly ask for more. Haag's own story of growing up in New York, her childhood intersecting with that of John's from grade school through college and beyond, beautifully captures a city and a time of that would set the stage for a relationship born of friendship and the innocence of youth with its belief that, with love, anything is possible. As a story of adventure, the element of risk is detailed in the telling of their many harrowing adventures together, when John would literally beckon Haag to "come to the edge," times when she would risk not only her heart for this man. Haag is a remarkable writer, as well as a remarkable woman. I loved every beautiful and lovingly chosen word of this very special book. Thank you, Christina.

Cindey says

Why do I feel so connected to the Kennedys? Could it be that I am 2 days older than Caroline, that John-John was born on my birthday, that their father was buried on my and John-John's shared birthday when I was in 1st grade? I used to imagine that they were really my brother and sister, separated at birth, living such a different life from mine. I lived vicariously through them.

I guess I should also mention that I don't like romance books. One person's idea of "romance" is another person's gagging with a finger in the mouth. But this book is wonderfully, dreamily written -- like a fairy tale, but one in which I am a character.

Without telling secrets or spreading gossip, Christina Haag has given life to the Kennedy family and love to John. Her tenderness in writing about the family is a refreshing escape from tabloid journalism.

Maybe you had to have a time in your life when you thought you would meet Prince Charming. Or maybe you DID meet Prince Charming and lost him.

In the 1970s there was a quote I had hanging on my wall: "If you love something very much, let it go. If it doesn't return, it wasn't meant to be yours. If it does return, love it forever." For Christina, I would also add

that some people we love are always, always with us, even if they are not physically with us.

Read this book! In one sitting, if possible! You won't want to put it down.

And watch for a red hawk!

KS says

Christina Haag has written an achingly beautiful memoir. Her respectful portrait of John Kennedy not only reveals him as a flesh-and-blood human being but at the same time captures the larger-than-life aspects of his story. Christina tells of how their paths wove themselves together and apart during their childhoods in New York and beyond, culminating in an intense, five year love affair -- what John called the longest courtship ever. Also of great interest is Christina's portrait of John's mother, whom she obviously admired and adored. Their friendship continued even after the affair with John was over. But this book is more than all that. It is a delicate tale of coming of age, of first love, that transcends its connection to a famous family.

Sophfronia Scott says

"There is something in the air, something ancient that makes you move more slowly. You turn a corner, you catch your breath, and the pale color of the sky reflects back the sheer measure of your soul." This book is the best of everything a memoir can be: lyrical, reflective, deeply affecting. Haag's writing is simply beautiful and you sense her strong abiding love on every single page. She does well by her friend, his family, and herself. An admirable work and a must read for all who study creative nonfiction.

Michelle says

This romance got to me more than anything I've ever read. Okay, so it was partly because I am so insanely jealous (this book has been on my shelf since it came out; I was too envious of Ms Haag to pick it up and read it), and also - tragically - because we know what the ultimate end of one half of the story is. I just found it so, so moving. I finished the book on the train this morning and closed it and sat there with my mouth hanging open (usually this only happens to me on the Tube when I fall asleep between Euston and Victoria, which I invariably do). The writing was wonderful, evocative without making it 'it's all about me'. I just... Argh, I can't even put it into words. A romance with the hottest guy who ever graced the earth... Seesh. I will read this again one day. When my head has stopped spinning.

We miss you, John.

Erika Robuck says

My fondness for memoir is growing, and I can now add another book to my pile of favorites. Christina Haag writes about her relationship with John F. Kennedy Jr. with honesty and depth. Her reflections are thought

provoking and powerful, and her style matches the ebbs and flows in the relationship. From full-bodied prose to episodic whimsy, Haag captures the story of their love and her personal growth with immediacy and wisdom. I highly recommend COME TO THE EDGE.

Kathy says

Beautifully Written

I rarely give 5 stars to books about "celebrities", but this one is different. Haag wrote this with love, respect and beautiful articulation. The reader gets a feel for Kennedy and his family, but she doesn't sensationalize her knowledge of the family. She weaves a memoir that pays tribute to the love they had, his life and does it with class.

I imagine Caroline Kennedy reading this, and being thankful. The book had me in tears at one point because not only is it about Kennedy, it is also about love that ends, and how truly poignant that will always be in one's life-even when it is over.

I would recommend this to anyone who wants to read a really touching memoir- but not to anyone who just wants to try and get "an inside scoop".

Kudos to Haag. Hope she writes more.
