



Surf Mama - One Woman's Search for Love, Happiness and the Perfect Wave

Wilma Johnson

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Wilma Johnson was living on the west coast of Ireland with her family, balancing the challenges of being an artist, wife and mother, until, in her forties, she was gripped by a deep desire to seize the day, and moved to Biarritz to become a surfer. The plan hits troubled waters as she arrives in France with her marriage on the rocks and three children who speak no French. Her first attempts at surfing are disastrous; resulting in bruises, broken bones and a damaged ego, but when she experiences the euphoric feeling of catching her first wave and sets up the Mamas Surf Club, it's all worth it.

Surf Mama - One Woman's Search for Love, Happiness and the Perfect Wave Details

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From Reader Review Surf Mama - One Woman's Search for Love, Happiness and the Perfect Wave for online ebook

Lianne says

I received this book from a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

Surf Mama: One Woman's Search for Love, Happiness and the Perfect Wave is a heart-warming, witty memoir about one woman's search for, well, all of the above.

Johnson's narration was brilliant. Her sense of humour was dry and self-deprecating, and I found myself smiling and laughing along with her. The language was rich and descriptive, but I didn't get bogged down in the details—her use of surf lingo was deftly explained; it didn't leave me feeling confused, thankfully, and I could enjoy the novel with ease. Often, I sat in a reading spot and just imagined myself watching the waves, so beautifully described was the scenery.

Surf Mama is definitely a book you sink into when you need a pick-me-up, and **not** something to be rushed. I found myself grabbing it at random and just reading until I felt happier. It's undoubtedly a feel-good book.

Johnson's journey is both motivating and enlightening—no, "adults" don't really know what they're doing after all, which, of course is a blessed relief. I thought I was the only one. Seeing her continue to work towards her goals despite all manner of setbacks, and just living in the moment was extremely moving. It left me wanting to better myself. And although I can only partly empathise, I enjoyed how she talked about her want to be more than just "wife" and "mother", of her need to be real again and not just a one dimensional figure.

Surf Mama is about reclaiming who you are as a person and a woman, and I would recommend it for anyone who's feeling a little bit lost in life.

Sam Walters says

Inspiring true story and really want to head down to the basque country now. Would like to have heard more about what Wilma learned over the course of her 10 year journey...perhaps there is scope for the story to continue in a sequel.

Paul says

As a self proclaimed earth mother, with three children and living on the west coast of Ireland, Wilma Johnson suddenly has the urge to learn to surf. Her husband has surfed for years, and until now she has always been a surf widow. Being the beautiful landscape of Dingle, next parish manhattan, they move to Biarritz in France.

Shortly after getting there her marriage hits a wipeout moment, her children cannot speak the language and she faces her greatest moment of despair. Finding other women who also want to learn to surf, she forms The

Mamas Surf Club. From that very first moment she catches the wave she becomes addicted to that feeling of freedom.

Following all her ups and down with surfing, family and building a new life in France, as well trying to find a new companion, this is a funny lighthearted view of starting a new life in a different country.

Elke says

Entertaining. Fun read.

Louise Armstrong says

I often think I'd like to take off and learn to surf, so you can take my lack of enthusiasm for this book as jealousy. My, she had a good start. Her parents sounded wonderful.

Anyhow, I read it all but wasn't 100% sold on the tone of the book. I Googled her art, and didn't connect with that either.

Nicki says

I enjoy reading or listening to memoirs and I loved this one. I particularly liked the writing style and laugh out loud humour in the book. It was so easy to read and to lose myself in it, joining the author's surfing challenge. I really like to go boogie boarding myself and have contemplated surfing in the past. Maybe I'll try it someday and become a surf mama!!

Catherine Robertson says

Funny, honest, admirable (enviable, even) and with her beautiful paintings as illustrations.

Caroline says

I won this as a First Reads on Goodreads

What a great book! It is a fantastic story and I liked the humour, it made me laugh out loud at times. A really enjoyable read and an inspiration for any women over a certain age!! I think a lot of women (or men!) who are about to change their lives will be inspired by Wilma's story. One thing is for sure I will NEVER be tempted to take up Surfing!! Hope she decides to write another novel in the future

K says

Sorry to be negative but this book really really annoyed me. I got so sick of the narrative voice which I felt was trying too hard and fairly unfunny.

I also found it all really repetitive - I was bad at surfing and a bit repressed as an 'earth mama' and then I improved and felt liberated! Not a lot more depth in my mind. The final conclusion is the same one she makes the first time she has any surfing success.

I didn't like it at all, sorry to say.

Tripfiction says

Memoir set in Biarritz (a town with a 'surf-oriented ley line')

Wilma Johnson is living on the West Coast of Ireland with her husband and 3 small children. She is an artist and homemaker, whilst her husband takes to the waves and enjoys the surf. After 10 years and an increasingly wobbly marriage, the whole family decamps to Olatua, Biarritz in search of the Endless Summer Dream. Her surfing life at the age of 44 is just about to begin and she determines to learn to stand on a piece of fibreglass in the Bay of Biscay. Not for her any length of time on a boogie board - (otherwise known as a turtle roter, speed bump or sponger) - which is surfed lying down, no, she is going for the full blown experience. It's do or die (and dying is quite a real possibility as she goes on to describe), surfing to her mind is 'deeply courageous', the rip tides, the wipeouts, the eskimo rolls and the tubes. Not to mention the weather, which is a capricious factor in the surfer's life: Biarritz seems to fluctuate between 'tropical paradise and Bay of Biscay sea shanty'.

She talks to Phil Grace, who has surfed the world and now shapes individual boards in Hossegor, Biarritz. Johanna, partner of Christophe Reinhardt (surf star, whose Father 'invented' surfing on the West Coast of France) is a driver behind the Mamas Surf Club - which started out as Desperate Housewives meets Baywatch, through the Boobs and Tubes surf club (remember a tube is where the wave is hollow where it's breaking. For some surfers it's the be all of surfing. It's sometimes called a barrel, keg, or pit..); to the The Nanas Surf Club (Nana means hot chick in French) to its final incarnation of the Mamas Surf Club (Mama in French means a sexually attractive, usually mature woman. Perfect!). So for this group of women it's out with the sex wax (you need it for the board so you stay on it) and the neoprene.

And what do you need to learn to surf and be very core and very cool? Good abs? So to start she learns to do the 'little press-up' - and as Christophe muses, surfing is 99% in your head and the other 1% requires complete fitness (plus a bit of inner goddess).

Now separated from her husband, and renting The Addams Family Mansion, as she calls her home, she has plenty of time to practise, all the while painting. It did occur to me that there was not a huge amount of overwhelming angst about her painting career, which is often the case for artists trying to sustain a living. But it transpires that in fact she used to hang out with Grayson Perry, the New Romantics, and goes on eventually to have a show at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, and then it's off to Tate

Modern.... so not too many worries on that score I would think.

This is a memoir full of determination and a life affirming attitude, bonkers in parts it has to be said, but I am left with a sneaking admiration for the author's determination to become a female surfer - in a very male world - in the first decade of the 21st century. I enjoyed this memoir, it's a vignette into the surfing world, written with candour and style. Would I like to try surfing? I think I might stick in the foam (the tiny waves that roll on the to the beach!) with my boogie board.

Pop over to our original blogpost and there we have bagged an interview with seasoned surfer, Dave Crozier, who talks to us what it is like to be paid to surf! <http://www.tripfiction.com/memoir-set...>

Kathryn Morris Burgess says

Did I find this book, or did it find me? One of the items on my bucket list is to learn how to surf a longboard, preferably in some lonely Pacific atoll. And sometimes, yes, I do just want to pack up the family in a campervan and go somewhere like Biarritz where we can actually focus on the business of LIFE instead of this idiotic rat race. I loved the spirit in this book. Wilma Johnson is courageous and completely aware of her fears / shortcomings. Yet nothing seems limiting. In modern life, that notion of "no limits" seems magical. It's funny and, yes, inspiring. I loved her descriptions of the sea and I want to see her goddess paintings.

One niggling criticism--yes, she's describing a world that is very male dominated, but the litany of nicknames inscribed by her womanhood--"surf mama," "earth mother," "surf widow," "the mamas" (there are more) annoys.

Steve Jackowski says

Wilma Johnson has written a gem of a memoir in Surf Mama. Through her self-deprecating humor, she ably juxtaposes the angst of middle-life crises and what becomes a near obsession with surfing. I'm a tough reviewer but now adhere to the standard of 5-stars means you would buy it for all of your friends. I must admit that I've started that process. Hopefully her publisher will recognize the market for this book in the States, targeting surf towns like Santa Cruz, California. I do note that in spite of a long delivery date according to Amazon.uk, Surf Mama arrived in a week with standard shipping. Not bad from England.

Fair warning to male readers out there. This is a woman's book, primarily written about and for women. Still, the story of someone pursuing a new-found passion in the midst of near chaos should make this book appeal to everyone.

Sarah says

Surf Mama - The best way to learn to surf without getting your feet wet!

Surf Mama was an enjoyable easy read. Wilma Johnson's slightly sarcastic descriptions had me chuckling throughout with one or two occasions I laughed out loud. I have never surfed yet I found the technicalities of the sport simple to read and understand. What came as rather a pleasant surprise was how inspirational I

found this book, as someone in the same age bracket as the author, who is facing the prospect of starting a new life, I was shown how with hard work and determination can bring its own reward. Thank you Goodreads for providing me a copy of this book from your giveaway, it was a very enjoyable read and I would be happy to honestly recommend this book to other readers.

Nicky says

Great story, wonderful humour and a very inspirational book!

Lisa Marie Gabriel says

Surf Mama is a lovely book. An easy and enjoyable read from start to finish with quite a few laughs along the way. I won my copy in a Goodreads Giveaway and entered simply because surfing has always been one of my “I wish I had” and “regret I never did” activities. I have no doubts of my unsuitability for surfing; I am well on the wrong side of fifty, have no balance to speak of and bear the legacy of a broken ankle that has left psychological scars as well as physical twinges. However, when I read how the author overcame all sorts of fears I immediately related to her story. I would happily join in with the Surf Mamas but could see my initiation into surfing would be infinitely more painful (even though I still do a mean front crawl). This is a book to be recommended to anyone with an urge to do the unthinkable or impossible, an inspiration and even a dose of “the craic” on the printed page. A well deserved 5 stars from me.
