

Grayson

by Lynne Cox

About the Book

Grayson is Lynne Cox's first book since *Swimming to Antarctica*. In it she tells the story of a miraculous ocean encounter that happened to her when she was seventeen and in training for a big swim (she had already swum the English Channel, twice, and the Catalina Channel).

It was the dark of early morning; Lynne was in 55-degree water as smooth as black ice, two hundred yards offshore, outside the wave break. She was swimming her last half-mile back to the pier before heading home for breakfast when she became aware that something was swimming with her. The ocean was charged with energy as if a squall was moving in; thousands of baby anchovy darted through the water like lit sparklers, trying to evade something larger. Whatever it was, it felt large enough to be a white shark coursing beneath her body.

It wasn't a shark. It became clear that it was a baby gray whale—following alongside Lynne for a mile or so. Lynne had been swimming for more than an hour; she needed to get out of the water to rest, but she realized that if she did, the young calf would follow her onto shore and die from collapsed lungs.

The baby whale—eighteen feet long!—was migrating on a three-month trek to its feeding grounds in the Bering Sea, an eight-thousand-mile journey. It would have to be carried on its mother's back for much of that distance, and was dependent on its mother's milk for food—baby whales drink up to fifty gallons of milk a day. If Lynne didn't find the mother whale, the baby would suffer from dehydration and starve to death.

Praise for the Book

"An inspirational, almost spiritual read."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

Lynne Cox is a master of story telling: her prose captures the vast movements and deep mysteries of the ocean and the creatures for whom it is home. Everyone who reads *Grayson* will be enchanted and profoundly moved. *Grayson* is a powerful voice for conservation."

—Jane Goodall, Ph.D., DBE

"[Grayson] leads to a tear-wrenching conclusion that could only have been lived—and written—by a woman unafraid to challenge the unknown in nothing but her swimsuit."

—*Bookpage*

Courtesy of Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

About the Author

Known As: Cox, Lynne Elaine; Cox, Lynne
American Swimmer (1957 -)

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Personal Information:

Born January 2, 1957, in Boston, MA; daughter of Albert (a radiologist) and Estelle (an artist) **Cox**. **Education:** University of California at Santa Barbara, B.A., 1975.

Addresses: Home: Los Alamitos, CA. Agent: Martha Kaplan, Kaplan Agency, 115 W. 29th St., 10th Fl., New York, NY, 10019; Bob Katz, 9 Meriam St., Ste. 14, Lexington, MA 02420.

Career:

Writer; endurance swimmer; motivational speaker; swimming instructor; formerly a research librarian in Orange County, CA.

Awards:

World records for swimming across English Channel, 1972 and 1973, Catalina Island Channel, 1974, Oresund and Kattegut (both Scandinavia), both 1976; named Woman of the Year, *Los Angeles Times*, 1975; inducted into Swimming Hall of Fame, 2000; lifetime achievement award, University of California at Santa Barbara; named Woman of the Year, *Glamour* magazine, 2002; Alex Award, American Library Association, 2004.

Writings:

- *Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer* (autobiography), Knopf (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Grayson* (autobiography), Knopf (New York, NY), 2006.

Contributor to the *New Yorker*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, and *European Car*.

“Sidelights”

Lynne Cox is a champion swimmer who occupies a unique niche. She is among the best of a very small group of people who do open-water endurance swimming, often in some of the most inhospitable bodies of water on the face of the planet. The swim from which she drew the title of her memoir involved traveling over one mile in just-above-freezing water off the coast of Antarctica; but this is only one in a long series of feats that are chronicled in *Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer*.

Cox undertook her autobiography's title swim in 2002, after thirty years of training. Although most people would die of hypothermia after only minutes in thirty-two-degree water, Cox's body is uniquely suited to such a challenge: she has a higher percentage of body fat than most competitive swimmers, and the fat is evenly distributed under her skin, almost forming its own wet suit and more than adequately insulating her internal organs. (Unlike most swimmers, Cox is so well insulated that her core temperature generally rises rather than falls during extended cold-water swims due to exertion.) Her insulating body fat also helps Cox by keeping her afloat. Her fat and muscle masses, which are respectively lighter and heavier than water, are perfectly balanced, giving her neutral buoyancy in the water: she neither floats nor sinks. Cox also swam as quickly as possible through the Antarctic waters in order to generate body heat through a high rate of muscular activity.

Cox, her brother, David, and her two sisters, Laura and Ruth, were born in Boston, Massachusetts, and all became competitive swimmers while growing up in Manchester, New Hampshire. Her father, Albert, moved the family to California when Lynne was twelve so the children would have better opportunities to work with Olympic swimming coaches. Lynne did not immediately appear to be the sibling with the most competitive potential, but once she was introduced to open-water swimming she quickly excelled, taking first place in two races and second in another when she entered her first open-water swimming competition that year. Cox writes about her first time training in the Pacific "with a zest that makes you want to tear off your clothes and jump in the ocean in January," Eric Nash commented in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Not long after, Cox entered her first long-distance open-water competition, a twenty-six-mile race from Catalina Island, across the Catalina Channel, to mainland California. This race was conducted under English Channel Association rules, which forbid wetsuits and most other technological assistance. Swimmers wore only their bathing suits, swim caps, goggles, and protective grease if they chose. Lynne continued to swim with only this gear in all of her subsequent swims, even the most frigid.

Cox first came to international attention for her swimming in 1972, when she was fifteen years old. That year she broke the record for the shortest time to swim across the English Channel, previously held by a man. When another swimmer broke her record the following year, she again swam the Channel and set a new best time. After that, as she writes in *Swimming to Antarctica*, "I had had enough of swimming the English Channel; I wanted to do something else." Cox set out on a daredevil's round-the-world tour of dangerous bodies of water: the Cook Strait, between the north and south islands of New

Zealand, where the currents kept pushing her far off track and it took her over twelve hours to cover ten miles; the Strait of Magellan, between mainland South America and the Tierra del Fuego, notable for its huge whirlpools; around the Cape of Good Hope, off South Africa, in waters infested with sharks; and across the horribly polluted Nile River in Egypt, where the raw sewage in the water left her with dysentery.

Endurance swimming is a sport with few major competitions, and Cox, who majored in history in college, soon began swimming not to win championships but to make political statements. She spent eleven years petitioning the Soviet Union to allow her to swim across the Bering Strait from Alaska to Siberia. Permission was finally granted for her to make the journey in 1987, after Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had begun the process of strengthening relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. In 1994, to celebrate the peace process then underway between Israel and its Arab neighbors, Cox did a fifteen-mile swim through the Gulf of Aqaba from Egypt to Israel and then on to Jordan. Although a casual observer might believe that this swim, in 80-degree water, would be easier for Cox than her frigid endeavors, in fact she had to be very careful to keep from overheating in the warm water.

These adventures "would make a great story even if Cox couldn't write," Joan Wickersham explained in the *Boston Globe*. "But she can. In prose that is lucid, clean, and powerful she evokes the physical and emotional experience of swimming." *Chicago Sun-Times* reviewer Mary Gillespie similarly praised the book as "an engagingly gripping read, an often engrossing tale of an extreme, otherworldly existence." "This is one spectacular book about one remarkable life," Verna Noel Jones concluded in the *Rocky Mountain News*. "Read it and you will never look at swimming the same way again."

In *Grayson*, Cox remembered one morning's swim off the coast of California. A large sea creature swam beneath her, creating an eddy in the water that sucked her in. She survived the mishap, and discovered that the creature was a baby gray whale whom she calls Grayson. The whale calf was apparently lost from its mother, and Cox swam with it for a while. The memoir gives Cox a chance to describe many encounters with other sea life, prompting Claudia Smith Brinson to comment in a review for the *Columbia, South Carolina State*: "Perhaps Cox compressed many wonders over much time into this one-morning memoir." In any case, Brinson felt, "we benefit from the beauty of this journey." Cox intersperses larger observations about life throughout her story of the encounter with the whale, giving the book "an inspirational, almost spiritual" tone, according to a *Kirkus Reviews* writer. It is "moving and thrilling in its simple language," stated Vanessa Bush in *Booklist*, and the experience it relates is "unforgettable."

Books:

- Cox, Lynne, *Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer*, Knopf (New York, NY), 2004.
- Cox, Lynne, *Grayson*, Knopf (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Great Women in Sports*, Visible Ink Press (Canton, MI), 1996.

Periodicals:

- *America's Intelligence Wire*, November 8, 2004, Melinda C. Hall, "American U.: Brockovich Encourages Women to Take Political Positions"; December 26, 2004, Sanjay Gupta, "Encore Presentation: A Look at Limits of Human Endurance."
- *Booklist*, December 15, 2003, Keir Graff, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*, p. 719; January 1, 2005, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*, p. 771; May 1, 2006, Vanessa Bush, review of *Grayson*, p. 4.
- *Bookseller*, February 4, 2005, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*, p. 37.
- *Boston Globe*, March 7, 2004, Joan Wickersham, "Fire and Water: Lynne Cox's Unquenchable Spirit Propelled Her to Awesome Accomplishments in Swimming."
- *Boston Herald*, February 8, 2004, Judith Wynn, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*.
- *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 4, 2004, Mary Gillespie, "Stroking across Oceans to Glory."
- *Current Science*, August 29, 2003, Kirsten Weir, "Too Cold: Cold-Water Marathon Swimmer Lynne Cox Made the Ultimate Splash--in Antarctica," p. 10.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, January 16, 2004, Joshua Rich, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*, p. 74.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, November 15, 2003, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*, p. 1347; May 15, 2006, review of *Grayson*, p. 504.
- *Library Journal*, December, 2003, Deirdre Bray Root, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*, p. 129; June 1, 2006, Margaret Rioux, review of *Grayson*, p. 150.
- *New York Times*, January 25, 2004, Erica Sanders, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*.
- *People*, May 4, 1987, Jack Friedman, "Swimmer Lynne Cox Braves for an Ice Water Ordeal, a Dire Crossing in the Bering Strait," p. 46; August 24, 1987, Kim Hubbard and Jack Kelley, "Lynne Cox's Brave Swim across the Frigid Bering Strait Breaks the Ice with the Russians," p. 32.
- *Publishers Weekly*, December 1, 2003, review of *Swimming to Antarctica*, p. 51; May 1, 2006, review of *Grayson*, p. 45.
- *Rocky Mountain News*, January 23, 2004, "Tales of Epic Swims Breathtaking."
- *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 1, 2004, Patricia Corrigan, "Lynne Cox Chills Out around the Globe."
- *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 25, 2004, Eric Nash, "From Phys-Ed Flop to Phenomenon in Frigid Waters."
- *Science World*, March 24, 1995, Caroline Alexander, "The Aquatic Ambassador: To Bring Nations Together, Lynne Cox Swims across Troubled Waters," p. 14.

- *State* (Columbia, SC), December 6, 2006, review of *Grayson*.
- *Sports Illustrated*, October 17, 1994, Caroline Alexander, "The Aquatic Ambassador," p. B7; February 17, 2003, Andrea Woo, "How She Trained: Before Hitting the Water, This Swimmer Frequently Hit the Weight Room," p. A11, Kelli Anderson, "Deep Freezing: With Ice Water in Her Veins, Famed Ultraswimmer Lynne Cox Took the Plunge near Antarctica," p. A11.
- *Sports Illustrated Women*, November 1, 2002, Bill Donahue, "Against the Tide: Swimmer Lynne Cox Braves Sharks, Ice and Hypothermia on a Mission to Change the World," p. 65.
- *Women's Wear Daily*, January 20, 2004, Natasha Singe, "The Icewoman Cometh," p. 4.

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- *CBS News Online*, <http://www.cbsnews.com/> (February 12, 2003), Scott Pelley, "Swimming to Antarctica."
- *International Swimming Hall of Fame Web site*, <http://www.ishof.org/> (June 12, 2007).
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Author Interview

Q: Grayson depicts the extraordinary events that occurred during one of your morning training sessions in the Pacific Ocean. Why did you decide to write about this miraculous encounter now?

Lynne Cox: For many years I thought about the experience, and it took time to figure out how to write about it and how to share the story with other people.

Q: Your descriptions of marine life are so vivid that readers will feel as though they are in the water with you, searching for Grayson's mother. Were you able to recall the day's events by memory or did you rely on a journal?

LC: Because the experience was so unusual, I remembered many of the events. I wanted to immerse readers in the experience and put them mentally and emotionally in the water with me. I returned to Seal Beach and swam off the pier and along the shore so I could describe details I would have otherwise missed if I only had recalled the experience.

Q: As an open-water swimmer, you need to be aware of every creature in the sea, as well as to detect changes in the air and ocean currents. How did you become so in tune with nature?

LC: One of the reasons I love to swim in open water is because it enables me to observe what's around me. It's not like pool swimming where the water is controlled and tamed. The ocean, sky, sun, stars, wind, currents, and tides are always moving and changing. I move through a dynamic place that, at times, is very dramatic. I love to be able to explore places I've never been or discover something new around me.

There's something really amazing about having a baby whale or dolphin come up and swim alongside of you.

Q: You recount many of your long-distance swims in the bestselling memoir, *Swimming to Antarctica*. Where would you rank this swim in relation to your other impressive oceanic adventures?

LC: Swimming with Grayson was one of the most unique experiences in my lifetime. That moment in time, though, was far more than a swim; it was really a turning point for me in my life. It was when I realized that I wanted to attempt things that others might consider really difficult or perhaps nearly impossible, and if I stayed committed and focused, I could achieve them.

Q: You also participate in events to raise awareness of environmental issues, such as your swim across the Ohio River in August 2006. Are you involved in any other clean-water causes?

LC: The Sierra Club and Rivers Unlimited contacted me to participate in that swim across the Ohio River; they've stayed in touch and update me on their progress.

I continue to be asked to participate in clean-water and other environmental causes and I do so whenever I can.

Q: Grayson has touched readers from five to ninety-five. Why do you think this book has such a broad appeal?

LC: The story is about believing in one's self and one's ability, and it's about one's interconnected place in the world. Whether you're a child, a teenager, an adult, or a senior, I think you want to recognize that connection in one way or another. When you read the book, I hope that you feel what it was like to swim with Grayson and feel the sense of real-life magic.

Source Citation:

Interview with Lynne Cox, author of *Grayson*, Retrieved October 13, 2008, from <http://www.harcourtbooks.com/grayson/interview.asp>

Discussion Questions

1. Grayson opens with descriptions of the eerie yet magical encounters Lynne had with grunion. What makes the oceanic world alluring for her? How does it change us to be immersed in a realm where humans are in the minority?
2. What made this mission so important to Lynne? Would others have taken such care to protect Grayson?
3. Lynne was determined to believe that Grayson's mother was alive. Did you share her optimism? How did you respond to her words about positive energy? How would the world be different if everyone followed her philosophy?
4. On the morning she met Grayson, Lynne was assisted by many people, from Carl the fisherman to a platoon of seasoned lifeguards. Teamwork among people who watched out for each other and shared wisdom was essential to a successful outcome that day. Who plays a similar role in your life? Who provides the best guidance?
5. Lynne recalls that her friends in high school had been outsiders and that she had enjoyed knowing a variety of people who did not focus on superficial concerns. How did this perspective shape her outlook at the age of seventeen, when she was confronted with the task of helping Grayson?
6. Discuss Lynne's attempts to communicate with Grayson and vice versa. How does sonar compare to human vocal chords and words in terms of its limitations and its range of possibilities? How do animals (including humans) "explain themselves" to one another?
7. What were the implications of size and degrees of power as Lynne searched for Grayson's mother? As she swam farther out, a tiny person in the wake of ships and massive creatures, was she in fact so "small"? In emotional terms, was Grayson so huge?
8. Lynne describes the oil rig's hum as reminding her of Manhattan: intriguing but mechanized, the opposite of the earth's natural energy. How did you react to the types of dangers she encountered that day? Did you feel differently about man-made dangers versus natural ones?

9. What did you discover about the anatomy and physical needs of a baby whale compared with those of a human infant? What is the mother's role in her offspring's survival?
10. How does Lynne cope with fear and anxiety when she first encounters Grayson? How is she affected by his fearlessness around jellyfish and the pier's fishing lures? What does he teach her about being agile and confident?
11. Whales appear frequently in storytelling, from the biblical narrative of Jonah to Melville's classic *Moby-Dick*. How does Lynne's account of her experience with whales, in which she was able to physically touch both Grayson and his mother, compare with other accounts of whales that you may have read?
12. When Lynne returns home and is reunited with her own parents, she downplays the events of that morning. Why do you suppose she does this? How does anyone effectively tell such a story?
13. The image of beautiful dolphins served as a good omen in Grayson. What makes them special among sea creatures? What will you take with you from the image of Lynne and Grayson interacting with them?
14. Ultimately, what is the source of Lynne's endurance? What is your equivalent to the moments when she tells herself, "Go, go!" despite tremendous exhaustion?
15. What do you believe was being communicated when Grayson and his mother were reunited? How did you interpret that scene? How might the book have unfolded if it had been "written" by Grayson or his mother? How would they have described Lynne?
16. Lynne's previous book, *Swimming to Antarctica*, features many missions that take her around the world—even placing her in the midst of geopolitical change. How does her goal to reunite a mother whale and her baby compare with those future missions, or with her previous experience of swimming the English Channel at the age of fifteen? What appears to drive all of her endeavors?

Courtesy of Harcourt