



A Pearl in the Storm

By Tori Murden McClure
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Introduction

"In the end," writes Tori McClure, "I know I rowed across the Atlantic to find my heart, but in the beginning, I wasn't aware that it was missing."

During June 1998, Tori McClure set out to row across the Atlantic Ocean by herself in a twenty-three-foot plywood boat with no motor or sail. Within days she lost all communication with shore, but nevertheless she decided to keep going. Not only did she lose the sound of a friendly voice, she lost updates on the location of the Gulf Stream and on the weather. Unfortunately for Tori, 1998 is still on record as the worst hurricane season in the North Atlantic. In deep solitude and perilous conditions, she was nonetheless determined to prove what one person with a mission can do. When she was finally brought to her knees by a series of violent storms that nearly killed her, she had to signal for help and go home in what felt like complete disgrace.

Back in Kentucky, however, Tori's life began to change in unexpected ways. She fell in love. At the age of thirty-five, she embarked on a serious relationship for the first time, making her feel even more vulnerable than sitting alone in a tiny boat in the middle of the Atlantic. She went to work for Muhammad Ali, who told her that she did not want to be known as the woman who "almost" rowed across the Atlantic Ocean. And she knew that he was right.

In this thrilling story of high adventure and romantic quest, Tori McClure discovers through her favorite way—the hard way—that the most important thing in life is not to prove you are superhuman but to fully embrace your own humanity. With a wry sense of humor and a strong voice, she gives us a true memoir of an explorer who maps her world with rare emotional honesty.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the title *A Pearl in the Storm* mean? What are the pearls Tori Murden McClure refers to?
2. Humility, tenacity, courage, knowledge, pain, anger, despair, and hope are all themes of the book. How are they manifested individually in the story? How are they connected?
3. The most common question about the trip asked was, "why do it?" Why did Tori want to row solo across the Atlantic? What was she seeking? What was lacking in her life before her journey?
4. The author responded to critics with a question of her own. "How are we human beings to progress without testing our limits or going behind what is known?" How would you answer her?
5. "I didn't expect the Atlantic to make me a better person. But I did expect the Atlantic to make me a wiser person," Tori writes. Did her journey make her wiser? Did she underestimate her expectations? Did it make her a better person as well?
6. What is your opinion of Tori? How would you describe her? Did your view of her change through the course of the book?
7. Would Tori have come under such scrutiny for her ambitions if she'd been a man? Why is there still a double standard when it comes to the achievements of men and women? Do you think she is a good role model for both girls and boys?
8. Talk about her childhood and her relationship with her brother Lamar. How did it shape her life and lead her to a solo venture across the Atlantic?
9. Throughout the memoir, Tori speaks of "helplessness." Why is this so crucial to her? Why does she equate love with helplessness? How does her outlook evolve?
10. Tori took a number of books, music, and even portraits of the presidents. Why did she choose these items? If you were to undertake a journey like this, what might you take?
11. During the trip, the author listens to a lecture about Aristotle and ponders the relationship between courage and knowledge. "Aristotle believed that humanity is influenced more by fear than it is by faith." Do you agree with this? How do courage and knowledge relate to fear and faith?
12. When Hurricane Danielle hit the American Pearl, Tori waited through horrendous conditions before finally setting off the emergency beacon. She could have died out there. Why did she wait so long?
13. For months after the attempt, the author harbored shame for having "failed." Why do you think she so firmly held this opinion of herself? In your eyes, did she fail?

14. When she decided to make a second attempt to cross the Atlantic, Tori vowed, "This time, things will be different." What was different about the second trip? How was she different?

15. What impact did the journey across the Atlantic ultimately have on the author? What lessons did you take away from *A Pearl in the Storm*?

About the Author

Tori Murden McClure is the vice president for external relations, enrollment management, and student affairs at Spalding University. Her firsts include being the first woman to row solo across the Atlantic and to ski over land to the South Pole. She has an AB from Smith College, where she currently serves on the board of trustees, a master's in divinity from Harvard University, a JD from the University of Louisville School of Law, and an MFA in writing from Spalding University. She has worked as a chaplain at Boston City Hospital, and for Muhammad Ali at the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville. She lives in Louisville, Kentucky, with her husband.