

# Be Surf

*a surgeon's brief manual for living*



Sara Dyer

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A SURFER'S BRIEF MANUAL FOR LIVING



SARA DYER

FIÑETTE PRESS

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*for dad, who sponsored my first surf lesson and wouldn't let me  
chicken out when I tried to, and for mum, whose endless love from  
beyond the sky emboldens me to live as wildly and bravely as  
possible. love you.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### **BE SURF.**

That phrase came to me while surfing with my bud Amber, somewhere in Rhode Island or Massachusetts. She's my most meta friend--a trained Kundalini yoga teacher, a filmmaker, an artist. Our talks get deep and starry, and we were talking about all the lessons we'd learned from surfing. All the principles that a day out on the water teach you that we realized could really apply to life in general. And the phrase came up: *Be surf*.

It's so many things.

Be here now. Be wild. Be focused. Be loose. Be kind.

Really, just, be surf.

Since then, years ago, I've found it's true over and over. That I'll walk away with some profound and simple (in fact, usually profoundly simple) learning lesson almost every day I'm out on the water. Often the lessons repeat themselves. And one that is true always is this: *Every day is a learning day*.

No matter the conditions, no matter how we surf, really no matter what, we will learn something that day. Even if the something is "I should have prepared differently" or "I

## INTRODUCTION

should have been more respectful to that other surfer” or “It’s too cold to be out today.” or “I should have worn a bikini that was actually functional for athletic activities.”

That, and so many other principles that I’ve learned out on that salty water, have made me a better, kinder, more confident human.

I’m stoked to share them with you.



WE'VE ALL BEEN BEGINNERS AT  
SOME POINT



No one came flying out of their mother's body on a surfboard.

We've all been beginners.

Some surfers, and damn am I jealous, *practically* started surfing the day they were born but, regardless, everyone has struggled. Even the most naturally gifted surfers have taken wipeouts, made a bad judgement call on the water, forgotten or been unaware of the local rules of the area.

Provided the beginner is doing their best to be respectful and learn out on the water, practicing the Golden Rule out on the water is just as important as off the water.

Treat others how you'd like to be treated, beginner or not.

WALK THROUGH THE FEAR AND EAT  
DONUTS



My friend Amber and I were bouldering together at the rock wall when we realized we'd both taken surf lessons in Hawaii, on different islands, and both been bitten by the surf bug.

"It's too bad you can't surf anywhere else," I said. Poor sweet naive me, who apparently thought, somehow, that on all 2,000 miles of coastline on the East Coast, nary a wave one could surf.

"Brah," Amber said, "You know you can surf here?" she said.

"What? No," I said.

"Ya," she said. "I saw tons of surfers all the time when I was living in Rhode Island."

And so, two chalky hands shook on it—to take a surf lesson in Rhode Island for her birthday in August.

And we did.

Amber rented a little spot through AirBNB. We sat around the fire pit that night with other friends who came to town to celebrate her birthday, and laughed, and swatted

mosquitos, and got slightly nervous thinking about our surf lesson we'd booked with Narragansett Surf and Skate.

I've always been scared of sharks. Was scared the whole time I was out for my first lesson with my surf instructor Fuzzy. Was scared all the days leading up to our lesson in Narragansett.

Amber and I showed up that Sunday morning to the shop.

"Kerry's going to be teaching you today," the shop worker said. "Head to the beach and check in at the surf van."

I loved Kerry instantly.

He was a true soul surfer. Skinny as the day is long, with a bright white sunscreened nose, hair like the result of daily applications of the 90s favorite Sun-In. I giggled nervously while we checked in with him, making our way to the spot on the beach he told us was dubbed Kerry's Corner in his honor.

"Now," he said, kneeling in the sand.

"A wave is the product of every magical force--wind, fire, water," he said, drawing indistinguishable things that seemed very cosmic and solemn in the sand. "And that wave that you catch--that wave? Well, there's only one of those. And you'll be the only one to ride that wave. And there's nothing more special than that."

I loved him then, and loved him even more when the conversation careened into a five minute discussion of the discount donuts he often bought at the grocery store down the road.

The beach talk was long. There were many sand drawings, much encouragement, talk of pastries and finally, by the time we got out on the water, I felt less nervous.

I learned later it was Kerry's way of blowing away our nerves, to walk through a brief geologic lesson prior to our paddling out.

It was genius.

He helped me walk through the fear and every day, that is life, coming up to the fear, feeling the resistance and walking or paddling through it. Having the right support, distractions, friends, hobbies, can be a big help.

That, and donuts.

IF YOU RIDE A WAVE, YOU'RE A  
SURFER



When I was surfing by the pier in Carolina Beach one day, a small girl was out there on her boogie board.

It wasn't my best day, but I was catching some waves, and the first one I caught when she was around, she came running at me as I was paddling back out.

"Wow!" she shouted. "Wow wow wow! You are awesome!" I laughed.

"How do you do that?!" she asked.

I told her I spent as much time on the water as I could.

"I wish I was a surfer," she said. She looked down at her boogie board. Her lips moved to the side.

"Listen," I said. "I saw you ride that wave. You ride a wave, you're a surfer," I said. "Doesn't matter if you're on a boogie board, surfboard or just bodysurfing."

Her eyes sparkled like jewels in the sun. "You think?" she asked.

"I know."

She smiled, and spent the next hour paddling around me

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and peppering me with questions, whooping with excitement when she or I caught a wave.

It was a beautiful thing.

## LOG YOUR HOURS



**Y**ou will not get better sitting on the shore.  
You will not become a better surfer by doing everything other than surfing.

You will become a better surfer ... by surfing.

This applies to everything I can think of in life.

Living in your head and applying your energies to everything other than the thing you claim you'd like to improve at will keep you right where you are—small, grumpy, unskilled.

Malcolm Gladwell wrote a whole book about it: All you must do is log your hours.

Fall a thousand times, get tangled up in your leash and seaweed, cringe at the unskilled hot mess that you are, and then, a year later, take a step back and see how much progress you've made. Two years later, do the same. A whole lifetime later, marvel at the amazing and wild life you've had simply by putting in the time.

This is not science or surgery. This is not even multiplication tables or a second language.

Per Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Do the thing and you will have the power.*

It's really just that easy. It's really just that simple.