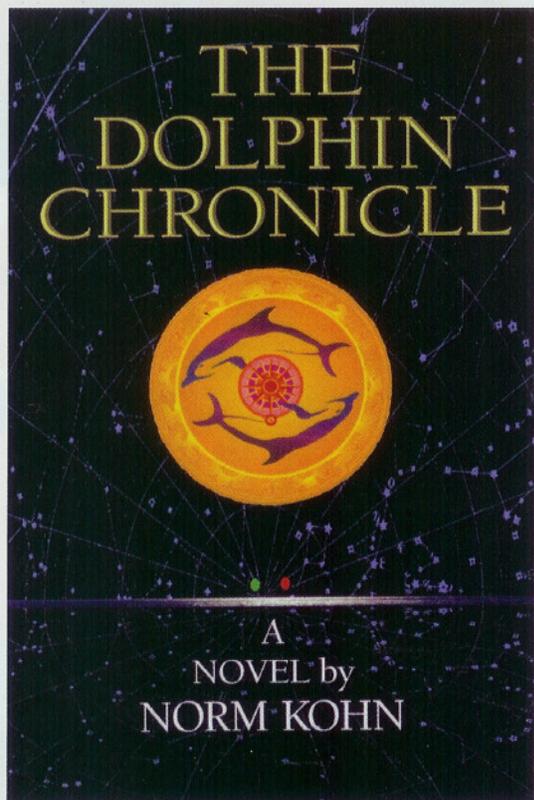


Book Review



“The Dolphin Chronicle”

By Norm Kohn

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Shaken and faced with his own mortality, Peter Jamison takes a hard look at his life, clearly sees that something is missing, and realizes it's time to discover what that something is. Leaving behind his wife and partnership at an Atlanta advertising agency, Peter and his son Charlie embark on a sailboat called September Song. Following the Atlantic coast through the languidness of the Low Country and into the tropical waters of South Florida, father and son are tested by the fickle uncertainties of Mother Nature, as well as human nature.

“The Dolphin Chronicle” is the second published novel by Atlanta author Norm Kohn. Pure storytelling magic, it is a beautifully written work of bright, lyrical prose, with compelling plotlines and thought-provoking themes. Although it is fictional, the “travelogue” aspect of the book is partly autobiographical, inspired by a sailing trip Kohn took with his own son through the waters of the Atlantic coast. From his personal experience springs

vivid imagery of the sights, sounds, sensations and settings his characters encounter:

“The orchestra of the night began a hesitant overture: a gust of wind in the rigging, a nightbird’s call somewhere out in the dark sea of cordgrass, the wisss of a dolphin sounding along the edge of the creek. Peace settled over Broad Creek, South Carolina, which is just off the Cooper River, just off Calibogue Sound, just off the Atlantic Ocean and, on this particular evening, just off the edge of the world.”

It’s passages like this that make the book a natural choice for anyone endlessly fascinated with the majesty and power of the sea; the aquatic creatures that ride its tides; or the dauntless men and women who navigate and plumb its depths. Unlike some boat stories, this one never gets bogged down in the technical aspects of sailing.

Action and drama are introduced to “The Dolphin Chronicles” with a light hand, even as the author weaves in subplots of greed and betrayal, second chances at love and international drug smuggling. For the most part, the story unfolds in present time, without lengthy exposition. Yet occasional short bursts of back-story provide fascinating glimpses of the characters’ pasts, as Kohn shows us how we’re shaped by forces we can’t always control in the game of life — and that by the time we realize what we’ve become, it may be too late to find salvation. Even the least sympathetic characters come off as profoundly and sadly human, including Bobo and Hink, mismatched misfits from wildly disparate backgrounds. The pair find solace in each other’s company, spending their days diving for sunken treasure near cleanly picked shipwrecks, until they find themselves tragically ensnared in the web of organized crime.

Less prominent characters are introduced without fanfare, but become instantly memorable. All contribute in small ways to both plot and thematic development as their paths cross in serendipitous or unfortunate ways. The friendship between taxi driver Johnny Dash and police officer Billy Sparks is pleasantly reminiscent of Bert and Ernie, the cabbie and cop duo made famous in the classic Capra film “It’s A Wonderful Life.”



The sailing odyssey continues with some unfolding events seeming to signal trouble in Peter and Charlie's personal paradise: a red Corvette explodes in a marina parking lot, urgent voices call for coast guard assistance on the ship's radio. Yet as *September Song* becomes home and Peter leaves his carefully constructed world behind, his mind seems to embark on its own journey of heightened awareness. Without deadlines and commitments, priorities rearrange themselves. When the ship's GPS device fails, Peter is reminded that man once navigated by an intuitive connection to the stars, rather than by the lines on a chart. He doesn't know it yet, but he is journeying between the left and right hemispheres of his mind, struggling to reconcile that which is learned and calculated with all that is primal and instinctive.

This is the theme he develops in a stream-of-consciousness journal, beginning with the lesson his artist mother taught him at her drawing board, her supple wrist creating fluid arcs across the page: "There are no straight lines in nature." Seven journal entries are sprinkled throughout the book and some readers may find them esoteric or disruptive; yet it's the philosophical themes explored within these musings that make this book great literature.

And it's through these inner revelations, plus a series of external events, that Peter ultimately realizes what most of us never do — that it is never too late to choose wonder over reason, to follow fluid dreams that have long been held captive by straight thinking. Like Ann Patchett's best-selling novel *Bel Canto*, this is a book that explores the precarious balancing act between creativity and logic. **PN**

—Hilda Brucker