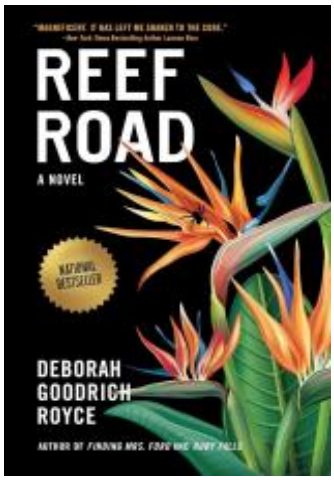
Reef Road

by Deborah Goodrich Royce



About the Book

When a severed hand washes ashore in the wealthy enclave of Palm Beach, Florida, the lives of two women --- a lonely writer obsessed with the unsolved murder of her mother?s best friend and a panicked wife whose husband has disappeared with their children --- collide as the world shutters in the pandemic lockdown of 2020.

?REEF ROAD is magnificent. It feels utterly real, a novel of deeply personal context. It swerves between truth and lies, the lies that lead to an even deeper --- and more devastating --- truth. Though pure fiction, it reads as compellingly as a mixture of memoir and exposé. It has left me shaken to the core. Deborah Goodrich Royce writes with brilliant understanding of the mystery and occasional grace of trauma.? ?Luanne Rice, *New York Times* bestselling author

A young woman?s life seems perfect until her family goes missing. A writer lives alone with her dog and collects arcane murder statistics. What each of them stands to lose as they sneak around the do-not-enter tape blocking Reef Road beach is exposed by the steady tightening of the cincture encircling them.

In a nod to the true crime that inspired it, Deborah Goodrich Royce?s REEF ROAD probes unhealed generational scars in a wrenching and original work of fiction. It is both stunning and sexy, and like a bystander surprised by a curtain left open, you won?t be able to look away.

Discussion Guide

1. REEF ROAD is inspired by a true crime that affected the author?s family. Writers like Dominick Dunne and Michelle McNamara are examples of writers who examined the profound effect a single act of violence can have on those who are not the victim. Are you familiar with this syndrome, and have you ever personally felt the tentacles of someone else?s injury alter the way you live or the choices you make?

2. The writer?s mother is forever changed by the murder of her best friend in 1948. But it was not until 1980 that the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder appeared in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Experiences such as war, sexual assault and childhood abuse seem to enter us at a cellular level and stay there. Are you able to discuss any experiences you have had, or that you are familiar with, that have affected you or someone you love?

3. The writer is damaged by her damaged mother. Linda and her husband, Miguel, are burdened with family scars as well. In 1966, Canadian psychiatrist Vivian M. Rakoff and her colleagues recorded high rates of psychological distress among children of Holocaust survivors, and the concept of generational trauma was first recognized. Are there patterns in your family that you can link to long-ago traumas of an earlier generation? Have you done any specific work to release their hold on you?

4. There is much debate among novelists about whether or not to write about the COVID-19 pandemic. Some feel it is too soon to ?go there? and are confining their novels to before or after this global experience. Royce chose to capture the eerie ?twilight zone? feeling of desertion and claustrophobic heat of the Florida lockdown in 2020, finding it conducive to the true crime and noirish ambience of REEF ROAD. Do you agree that the pandemic lockdown mimicked a wartime siege and lent constraints that served the thriller?

5. Are you fascinated by, or simply curious about, true crimes? What do you think it is about delving into horrific acts that really took place that captures our attention? Does it give us a sense of satisfaction or relief? And is that sense of relief possible if the crime has remained unsolved?

6. REEF ROAD fictionalizes an unsolved murder that took place in Pittsburgh in 1948. The author did not wish to comment on the real crime or its possible perpetrator. And she felt that fiction was a cleaner vehicle to explore overarching truths of human nature, minus the encumbrances of factual details. Have you considered this concept --- telling truth through fiction --- and do you agree with it?

7. Linda Alonso is a complicated woman, driven by strong passions. She changes sexual partners freely and uses people to get what she wants. Her storyline is the noir element of REEF ROAD. She does, however, deeply love her children, Diego (Gogo) and Esperanza (Espie). Is her love for her children enough to redeem her in your eyes?

8. The writer remains nameless until a pivotal moment when her name is revealed along with a central point of the plot. This is a moment when the separate storylines are joined and the reader understands what unites them. Were you surprised by these revelations, and did you find them satisfying?

9. The writer?s sections are written in first person and resemble journal entries. Linda Alonso?s sections are written as a book-within-a-book. We hear Linda?s voice in third person, but she remains unreliable. And the prologue of the book plays out as a bird?s-eye-view of the two teenage surfers and their gruesome discovery on Reef Road Beach, watched by the writer at a distance. Do you enjoy a changing perspective such as these in REEF ROAD? If you were to write a book (or have already?), what is your chosen voice?

10. Near the end of the book, the writer quotes the Bible, the classics and Shakespeare to talk about the sins of the fathers raining down upon the heads of the sons. Surely we live in a time when we are equipped to do the work to shake off the demons of the past, don?t we? Or do we?

11. The writer leaves Linda?s children alone when she finds them in Mexico. Emma Straub writes in THIS TIME TOMORROW, ?Happy endings were too much for some people, false and cheap, but hope --- hope was honest. Hope was good.? So, while REEF ROAD doesn?t end in a ?happily,? did you feel hope for Linda?s children at the end?

Author Bio

Deborah Goodrich Royce?s REEF ROAD, a national bestseller, was named one of the best books of 2023 by *Kirkus Reviews* and an Indie Next pick by the ABA. RUBY FALLS won the Zibby Award for Best Plot Twist, and FINDING MRS. FORD was hailed by *Forbes*, *Book Riot* and "Good Morning America." Her latest novel is BEST BOY.

Her Ocean House Author Series --- in partnership with Martin House Books and WCRI --- brings world-class authors like Sarah Ferguson, Emma Straub, Chris Bohjalian and Katie Couric to Watch Hill. With fellow authors Luanne Rice and Amy Scheibe, she created the Deer Mountain Writers? Retreat in the Catskills.

Deborah writes a book column for *Providence Monthly* and *Hey Rhody* magazines. She began as an actress on "All My Children" and in multiple films before transitioning to the role of story editor at Miramax Films, developing *Emma* and early versions of *Chicago* and *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Deborah holds a bachelor?s degree and two honorary doctorates, from both Lake Erie College and the University of Rhode Island. With her husband, Chuck, Deborah restored the Avon Theatre, Ocean House Hotel, Deer Mountain Inn, United Theatre, Martin House Books, and numerous Main Street revitalization projects in Rhode Island and the Catskills. She serves on multiple governing and advisory boards.

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