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The Age Of Daredevils



Synopsis

At the dawn of the twentieth century, a small but determined band of barrel jumpers risked their lives in one of the world's most wondrous waterfalls. Only a few survived. By turns a family drama and an action-adventure story, *The Age of Daredevils* chronicles the lives of the men and women who devoted themselves to the extraordinary sport of jumping over Niagara Falls in a barrel—a death-defying gamble that proved a powerful temptation to a hardy few. Internationally known in the 1920s and '30s for their barrel-jumping exploits, the Hills were a father-son team of daredevils who also rescued dozens of misguided thrill seekers and accident victims who followed them into the river. The publicity surrounding the Hills' spectacular feats ushered in tourism, making Niagara Falls the nation's foremost honeymoon destination, but ultimately set Red Hill Jr. on a perilous path to surpass his father's extraordinary leaps into the void. Like the works of Jon Krakauer and David McCullough, *The Age of Daredevils* explores the primal force of fear and the thirst for adventure that drive humans to the brink of death to see if they can somehow escape.

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Customer Reviews

I was middle-aged when I saw Niagara Falls. I was anxious to get to Toronto and completely disinterested in the Falls. I'd seen a million pictures and films of it. Water falling over rocks. Big

deal. When I caught my first glimpse of the Falls themselves, I was as awe-struck and mesmerized as everyone must be when they look at it. Reduced to a shadow of its former majesty by the construction of hydro-electric dams and surrounded by cheesy, dated tourist traps, it's still a magnificent, awe-inspiring sight. Having seen it, I can understand how the Hill family of Niagara Falls, Ontario became obsessed with the river. For the first half of the 20th century, the family of William "Red" Hill, Sr. was known for challenging the Falls, but that's only a small part of the story. "Red" Hill wasn't a professional dare devil, but a true River Rat who had a Tom Sawyer-like boyhood on the Niagara River. As a man, he supported his wife and seven children by operating a taxi service, but he also served as an unofficial, unpaid rescuer for anyone in trouble on the river. The story of his starring role in the rescue of two barge workers trapped above the Falls and facing death is one of the most incredible things I've ever read. He was there to save the life of a teenager playing on the frozen river when the ice broke up unexpectedly. He was awarded several medals for his rescue efforts and probably deserved more than he received. But there were many he couldn't save. A few were dare-devils who took on the Falls and lost, but most were suicides. What is it about the Falls that attracts people whose emotional pain has overwhelmed them? Through the decades, Red (and then his sons) recovered hundreds of bodies from that treacherous stretch of the Niagara.

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