



## One Great Book: Volume II, Episode 5 *Gift from the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

[Show Notes](#)

[00:00]

One Great Book Volume II, Book 5: Gift from the Sea

[UPBEAT INTRO MUSIC]

Hey readers, I'm Anne Bogel, and you're listening to *One Great Book*, the short-form podcast from the team behind *What Should I Read Next?*, where each week I pull one stand-out selection off my personal bookshelves and tell you all about it in ten minutes or less.

[MUSIC]

For me, there are two kinds of summer reads: fast-moving books that have me compulsively turning the pages, and more contemplative works that prompt me to *slow down*, both as a reader and as a person. Today's book falls in the latter category.

I re-read this book at the beach recently, for maybe the half dozenth time. It's an old book that many readers read annually, often by the seaside, and that's not a coincidence. It was *written* by the sea, many years ago, the cover is a beautiful blue-green, reminiscent of the ocean, with a seashell on the cover. Because of its *looks*, it's a staple of beach house rentals and oceanfront bookstores.

Luckily, you don't need to read Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *Gift from the Sea* by the water to appreciate it. This 1955 classic still feels fresh and relevant for today—it's striking how timely its observations seem to modern ears. Lindbergh writes about solitude, busyness, contentment, growing older, distraction, *carpool*—all things that matter deeply to me and my life 60-something years later. In fact, if you told me that books like *Digital Minimalism* and *How to Break Up With*



*Your Phone* were explicit modernizations of *Gift from the Sea*, I would believe you. It's a small book, and pithy, at just 130 pages; equal parts memoir, meditation, and practical guide; and wholly One. Great. Book.

[MUSIC]

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[02:00]

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*Gift from the Sea* wasn't intended to be a book at all. "I began these pages for myself," Lindbergh tells us in the opening lines, "in order to think out my own particular pattern of living, my own individual balance of life, work and human relationships. And since I think best with a



pencil in my hand, I started naturally to write...” She did this writing on Captiva Island, on Florida’s Gulf Coast, which became a refuge for the Lindbergh family in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It was nearly fifteen hundred miles from their Connecticut home, and back then the island itself was accessible only by boat. Captiva was a place where the Lindberghs could truly get away from it all—and they had a lot to get away from.

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The 1932 kidnapping and murder of her first-born son was covered in newspapers as “the crime of the century,” and the 1935 trial fueled a media frenzy. As World War II approached, her husband, aviator Charles Lindbergh, received copious attention for voicing unpopular (that is, pro-German) opinions.

But reading the pages of *Gift from the Sea*, you may not guess that Anne Morrow Lindbergh is from *that* Lindbergh family. There’s no whiff of celebrity about these observations; Lindbergh, early on, acknowledges the “privilege” of being able to choose the busy and full kind of life that she loves *and* that drives her to distraction, but she never mentions the burden of fame, only the quotidian demands of family, friends, community, home, and *work*. These disparate demands lead to fragmentation, and one of the key questions Lindbergh is working out in these pages is “how to remain whole in the midst of the distractions of life.” And the vexing thing about those distractions, is “it is not merely the trivial which clutters our lives but the important as well.”

[MUSIC]

Lindbergh uses the framework of the sea to examine these questions, approaching her own life through the lens of the shore: how is her existence like the beach itself, or a spiral-shaped moonshell, or an oyster bed, or a mirror-shaped double-sunrise? Using the shells as her guide, she talks about solitude and silence, marriage and encroaching middle age, the ebb and flow of healthy relationships, the challenge—and satisfaction—of finally becoming yourself. Lindbergh has a knack for the quotable, the kind of lines you’d jot in your reading journal, or perhaps even frame on the wall of your beachside retreat, like “when one is a stranger to oneself then one is estranged from others too.” Or, “the most exhausting thing in life is being insincere.”



[05:35]

Book lovers will find a kindred spirit in Lindbergh; it's clear the books she's read mean much to her—she's constantly quoting Rilke, Saint Exupery, Virginia Woolf. As an author, Lindbergh is clearly not in a hurry, and it's as if she asks you to slow down *with* her as you read. There's something about her writing that puts you in a thoughtful frame of mind, that spurs you to look at your own life with fresh eyes.

The miracle of this book—and I'm not sure I can describe it to you, really—is that Lindbergh writes about ordinary things, and somehow turns it into riveting stuff. I admire any author who can make the ordinary extraordinary, but the degree to which Lindbergh does this is breathtaking. Perhaps our own lives are more fascinating than we think? Because what she does, time and again, is call you to examine your *own* life. (I'm reminded of Oscar Wilde: "I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read on the train.") Lindbergh a skillful writer, and the final product is a treat.

*Gift from the Sea* is a perennial seller, something that surprised Lindbergh, even in her lifetime. Twenty years after the book's publication, she expressed astonishment that this little book of essays, that she wrote to work out her own problems, spoke to so many other readers. And spoken it has: *Gift from the Sea* has sold more than *three million* copies—which means it's been read tens of millions of times, because so many readers find it worth coming back to—and it's been translated into 45 languages.

In short, if you're looking for a small but mighty essay collection that coaxes you to view your own life with fresh eyes, that carries the wisdom of the ages yet feels just right for today, and that you could read over the course of a leisurely week or—if you do it my way—in a single afternoon, *Gift from the Sea* may be the next great book you're looking for.

[MUSIC]

Readers, learn more about *Gift from the Sea* and all of the great books in this volume by going to [modernmrsdarcy.com/onegreatbook](https://modernmrsdarcy.com/onegreatbook), with the number one spelled out, o-n-e modernmrsdarcy.com/onegreatbook. There are more great books coming in this volume. If you



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[07:48]

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I'd love to hear what you think about *Gift from the Sea* on Twitter or Instagram @AnneBogel that's Anne with an E, B as in books, O-G-E-L. You can also find me on Instagram @WhatShouldIReadNext.

Thanks to Kellen Pechacek for his sound design on today's episode.

Readers, that's it for this episode, thanks so much for listening.

And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading."

Happy reading, everyone.