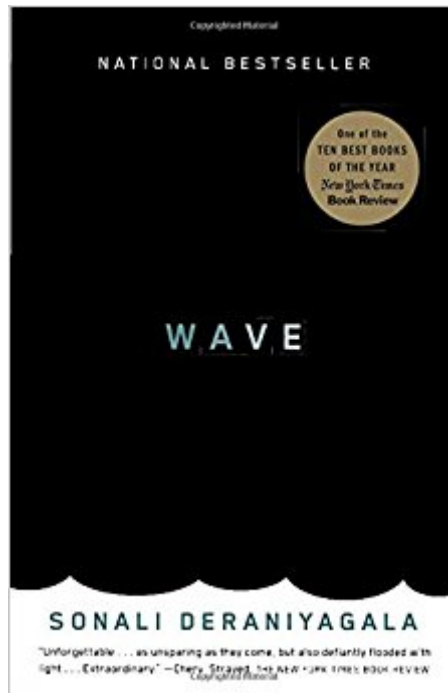


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# Wave



## Synopsis

One of *The New York Times's* 10 Best Books of the Year, a *Christian Science Monitor* Best Nonfiction Book, a *Newsday* Top 10 Books pick, a *People* magazine Top 10 pick, a *Good Reads* Best Book of the Year, and a *Kirkus* Best Nonfiction Book A National Book Critics Circle Award finalist. In 2004, at a beach resort on the coast of Sri Lanka, Sonali Deraniyagala and her family—parents, husband, sons—were swept away by a tsunami. Only Sonali survived to tell their tale. This is her account of the nearly incomprehensible event and its aftermath.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An *Best Book of the Month*, March 2013: In an unblinking act of storytelling, Sonali Deraniyagala ruthlessly chronicles the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami that horrifically snatched from her all that mattered. Throughout this fierce and furious book, I kept wondering how someone who lost so much could write about it with such power, economy and grace. At first, she shrieks and grieves openly, angrily; for years she remains stunned and staggered, shamed by the outlandish truth of me. Then, slowly, she allows herself to remember, sharing vivid glimpses of her past. We see, hear, and smell two rowdy little boys, their brotherly scuffling, their muddy shoes and grass stains. By confronting and recreating moments that make us laugh and weep, we accept their absence and root for the author not to quit. Difficult to describe, tricky to recommend, this is a bold and wondrous book. In a wounded voice that manages to convey the snide, sarcastic, funny, and fatalistic personality that survives beneath the pain, Deraniyagala slowly pieces together the elements that represent the life--the lives--she lost. And she brings them back. For us, for her, for them. So brave,

so beautiful, in these pages Deraniyagala's family is brilliantly alive. And so is she. --Neal Thompson --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

It was a festive time. Economist Deraniyagala, her economist husband (they met at Cambridge), and their two young sons flew from London to Sri Lanka to spend the winter holidays with her parents. They were all staying in a hotel near their favorite national park on December 26, 2004, the day of the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami. Deraniyagala describes their bewilderment as they flee the hotel and her terror as they are swept up by the 30-foot-high, racing wave that brutally changed everything. Only Deraniyagala survived. In rinsed-clear language, she describes her ordeal, surreal rescue, and deep shock, attaining a Didionesque clarity and power. We hold tight to every exquisite sentence as, with astounding candor and precision, she tracks subsequent waves of grief, from suicidal despair to persistent fear, attempts to drown her pain in drink, a helpless rage, a guilt and shame, and paralyzing depression. But here, too, are sustaining tides of memories that enable her to vividly, even joyfully, portray her loved ones. An indelible and unique story of loss and resolution written with breathtaking refinement and courage. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

This short book is one I will never forget. The writer tells us in simple, straightforward language how she managed to survive, and eventually, live, after losing her entire family in the 2005 tsunami. I don't think I've ever read anyone write as simply and stunningly as this - about extreme loss. At each juncture in the months, then years after the tsunami, readers learn how Deraniyagala coped by shutting out parts of her pre-tsunami life, and how she very gradually let memories in. She offers no magical answers, nothing but her years of dealing with this horrendous loss. I read a lot, about 70 books a year, and very very few get five stars. Five stars for me means the book goes way beyond "well-written", or "good story" to the level of impactful in my own life. I can't think of another book about loss that resonates so much - I have nothing comparable to her loss but her words help me view my own losses through different lenses. I will remember this book just as I will always remember Joan Didon's Year of Magical Thinking. . .it's unforgettable. Deraniyagala displays unbelievable courage.

Sonali Deraniyagala has undergone a tragedy of such magnitude that it amazes me that she has been able to write about it. On December 26, 2004, she was vacationing in Yala, Sri Lanka when a tsunami came and killed her husband and two children as well as her parents. Sonali managed to

hold on to a branch and survive. She is numb and incredulous. She can not speak, for to say the words of what happened would make it real and she feels better off in a fog. "I had learned some facts by now, so I recited them in my head. The wave was more than thirty feet high here. It moved through the land at twenty-five miles an hour. It charged inland for more than two miles, then went back into the ocean. All that I saw around me had been submerged. I told myself this over and over. Understanding nothing." For a long time, she avoids thinking about her family. She drinks heavily, takes sleeping medication and tries to keep herself in a stupor. She thinks of suicide constantly and imagines different ways that she can take her life. She sees no reason to go on without the family she adored. Her relatives in Sri Lanka watch her day and night but that doesn't stop her from cutting herself, and hurting herself in other ways. She and her parents are from Sri Lanka and she finds out that her parents' house has been rented. She harasses the renters, a Dutch family, because she wants to sit in the house where her children played and her parents lived, feeling the energy and calmness that is only available to her there. This book is the story of her journey during an eight year period. Both she and her husband were professors in London and were on sabbatical in Sri Lanka when the wave came. They were due to leave Yala that evening. Now, Ms. Deraniyagala is a guest professor at Columbia University in New York. We travel with her on her geographic journeys as well as her psychic ones as she yearns at first to be demolished and not to think of her family, to a place in her heart where she wants the memories of her family close to her. She attributes a lot of her healing to her therapist. It is poignant to see how she clutches the memories of her two boys to her heart at the end, one eight years old and one five years old when the tsunami hit. We learn how she met her husband, Steve, while a student at Cambridge. Sonali imagines what her children and husband would be like today. She grasps at these memories in order to make herself whole though she keeps her personal history mostly to herself when with acquaintances. "By knowing them again, by gathering threads of our life, I am much less fractured. I am also less confused....I can recover myself better when I dare let in their light." This is a brave and heartrending memoir, one that is shocking and horrific at times. I try to imagine what the author is going through and it is impossible. No one but she can feel this pain. I highly recommend this book for its forthright manner and truth, both its despair and ultimately, its resilience in the face of great loss.

An absolutely tremendous story is related here...and then so much more. On December 26, 2004, the Indian Ocean earthquake resulted in the Asian Tsunami - the deadliest tsunami in history and one of the largest single event catastrophes of all time. Sonia Deraniyagala and her family - her husband Stephen and her two sons, Vikram and Malli - were visiting her parents in Sri Lanka. When

the 'wave' as Ms. Deraniyagala refers to it, came, it took the lives of her husband, boys and both of her parents, somehow miraculously sparing her. The story of her escape from the tsunami, by holding onto a tree branch which prevented her from being swept away into the sea, is only the beginning of her tale. The balance of the book is Ms. Deraniyagala's journey from severe near-suicidal depression over her horrific loss to slowly emerging and regaining her life; and going from barely being able to think about her children without spiraling to being able to tolerate thinking about and including in her imagination her boys. On the way, she recounts details of her family's lives, especially her two boys. Her prose and detail are astounding to the point of realistically being able to imagine being present for some of her boys' milestones, and even some of those that might have - but of course did not - occur after the tsunami. Unimaginably horrific and powerful at the same time, you will appreciate life and develop perspective in a new way after reading this book. It will leave you simultaneously crying and praying for Ms. Deraniyagala's redemption. I finished this story while on vacation, and upon my return, immediately searched for photos of her sons and husband, just to put faces to individuals with whom I felt a deep bond despite never having met any of them.

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