

One night, Virginia Eubanks received the kind of news we all fear. Her beloved partner had been brutally beaten, just steps from their home.

She jumped in the water.

Eubanks dove into the responsibilities of caregiving. In the weeks, months, and years that followed, she and her partner, J., struggled to stay afloat as they faced wave upon wave of setbacks: police disinterest, suspended health insurance, inadequate medical care, lost income, lost friends, endless paperwork, and, for J., a serious case of post-traumatic stress disorder. Then, a second case. Eubanks herself developed what is known as collateral PTSD, a condition common among caregivers but rarely discussed.

She scanned the horizon for help.

A reporter and an activist, Eubanks turned to reliable sources for guidance: scientists, therapists, trauma theorists, social movements. But it wasn't until she happened on an old lifesaving manual that she found advice that actually helped. Inspired by its lessons, she signed up for instruction in wilderness first aid, kayak self-rescue, Winter Survival 101, map and compass navigation, bushwhacking, and lifeguarding. She went out in search of other people's stories and interviewed experts—everyone from neuroscientists to forest rangers. She gathered skills and knowledge that made her feel strong, competent, better prepared for the challenges ahead.

Disarmingly funny and quietly wise, *A Guide to Open Water Lifesaving* is the story—heart-wrenching and all too relatable—of how one woman tried to rescue her beloved and learned that she would also have to rescue herself. Built from both loss and connection, it is a moving, hopeful love story about two people caught in their own kind of wilderness, trying not just to survive but to truly care for each other. It asks that we reconsider the ways in which we tend to our loved ones and ourselves, and remember the communities of care that sustain us. It reminds us: no one survives the wilderness alone.

Virginia Eubanks is an investigative journalist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Guardian*, *Nature*, and *Scientific American*. She is the author of *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*. She is an associate professor of political science at the State University of New York in Albany. When not sleeping in her truck in the Adirondacks, she lives in Troy, New York.

Read by the Author



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A Guide to Open
Water Lifesaving

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