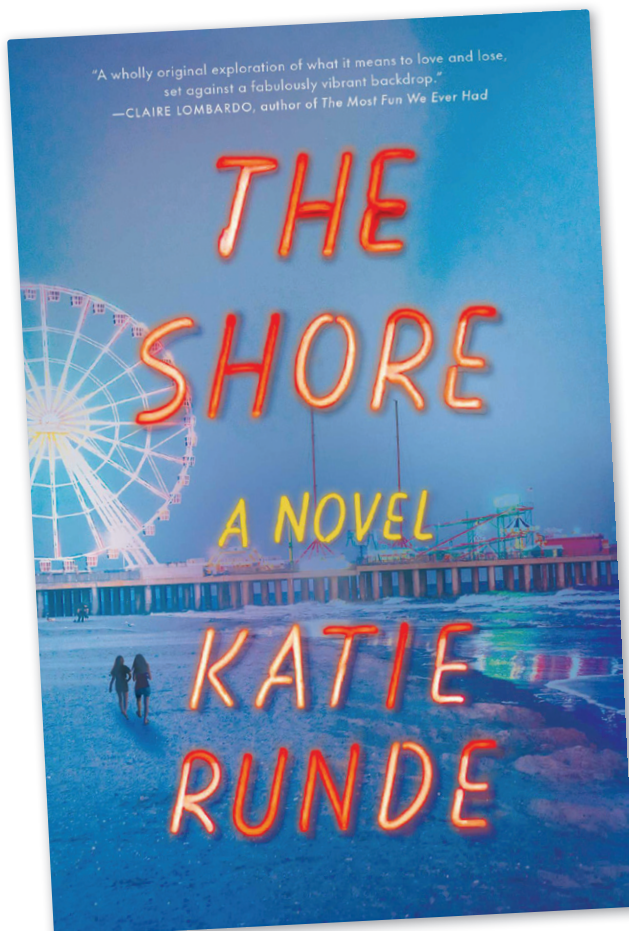


The Shore at The Shore

Katie Runde's Debut Novel of Love, Loss, and Growth

by Jill Ocone

With her flair for weaving lucid details and authenticity, Katie Runde's debut novel *The Shore* transports readers to warm beach days that aren't as delicious as they may first appear. Underneath the glitter of the ocean and the blazing summer sun is a tender and haunting bona fide story of a close-knit family facing a shocking and unexpected tragedy with an inevitable end, and how navigating a devastating illness can shape someone in ways he or she never imagined.



Published by Scribner in May 2022 and met with rave reviews, *The Shore* centers around the Dunne family during one transformative summer of crisis alongside the boardwalk and beaches of Seaside, New Jersey. However, the Dunne family provides an angle not seen in many other Jersey Shore novels: they are not summertime visitors but year-round Seaside residents who rely upon the summer tourist economy as their main source of income. "It's a tribute to the year-long boardwalk and tourism workers who keep the shore going in the off-season," Runde said.

Brian and Margot Dunne are former school teachers who built their summer rental property business from the ground up by buying units one at a time. Their teenage daughters Liz (seventeen years old) and Evy (sixteen years old) used to enjoy carefree beach days and nights lit by fireworks and bonfires until doctors diagnose Brian with glioblastoma multiform tumors (GBM).

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The Shore, A Novel by Katie Runde, Scribner Books.



Author Katie Runde.



Katie Runde (right) and friend, Stephanie McLoughlin Wnek, working at Marty's Doghouse in Seaside Park, 1998.

Similar to the fictional Dunne family she created, Runde was raised in Seaside Park and her family operated many Seaside businesses, including wheel games, parking lots, an umbrella rental business, and Marty's Doghouse before her own father, Martin "Marty" Hughes, was diagnosed with GBM when she was nineteen years old. "GBM affects everyone differently, and symptoms can vary," Runde explained. "It affects the social and emotional area of the brain and differs from conditions like dementia and Alzheimer's. The person changes, not their memories."

When she set out to write a novel, Runde noted few fictional works focused on the truths of GBM, especially how the lives of both the diagnosed person and the circle of family surrounding him or her drastically change over the course of the illness. "GBM is the most aggressive and deadly forms of cancer, and it's a difficult way to lose someone," she said. "My father was diagnosed during my first year of college and passed away two weeks after I graduated in 2004."

She knew she had a unique premise: a story set at the shore about a family fractured by an unimaginable medical diagnosis and how

a wife and two daughters cope with Brian's radical transformation from an active runner and surfer into an unpredictable stranger before their very eyes. The novel's point-of-view shifts among Margot, Liz, and Evy's perspectives, and this storytelling device provides a glimpse into each character's intimate thoughts and the sacrifices each makes along their conjoined experience of traversing

a new reality with nothing but grief waiting at the finish line.

The novel opens after Margot distances herself from her former group of friends she now sarcastically refers to as the "casserole bitches," due to their half-hearted attempts to help by delivering bland concoctions more so for show than out of actual concern. She has nobody to confide in and is tight-lipped around her daughters about her heartache but freely posts the truth about her situation and her anguish in an online GBM support group forum.

Liz and Evy appear to be typical shore teenagers, with the adventure-craving Liz working at the Sun and Shade umbrella rental stand while Evy works at Sal's Sweets candy shop and falls in love with her friend, Olivia. They balance their lives with summer jobs, activities with friends, and helping care for their father, but both are deeply hurting underneath their tough exteriors as Brian's condition worsens.

In between working and house parties, Evy finds a way to connect with her distant mother by adopting an online persona of a forty-five-year-old woman in the same online forum that Margot frequents. Evy learns that Margot is thinking about leaving



Runde's father, Marty Hughes, working one of the game stands he owned on the Seaside Heights boardwalk, 1998.



O'Connell

Runde signs her book for a reader at Thunder Road Books in Spring Lake.

Seaside in the aftermath and starting fresh in a place where she cannot smell or feel the ocean's breeze, which will only remind her of the life she should have had with Brian. Through clandestine forum posts, Evy and Liz ultimately dissuade Margot from her plans.

One of the more interesting choices made by the author is having the girls locate a CD-ROM filled with archived emails exchanged between Brian and Margot during their college years. Readers are presented with a slice of life during the late 1990s when email was new and a much faster way to communicate versus mailing hand-written letters. Cell phones were yet to be mainstreamed, and email was considerably less expensive than long distance telephone calls. "The cadence of that communication is hard to explain," Runde stated. "There was a space in between email messages versus the instant communication of today. The magic of fiction is that most people didn't save those emails and they disappeared, but Liz and Evy have a snapshot of their parents' relationship." The emails allow the girls to

see the budding love story between their parents and how that relationship almost became derailed. Runde remarked that readers, along with Liz and Evy, can fill in the time between Brian and Margot's emails to create their own narrative within that space.



A 2000 graduate of Central Regional High School in Bayville, Runde first fell in love with writing in middle school when practicing for standardized tests. She met her husband, Dan, while studying at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. She previously taught high school English and Spanish, volunteered at a nonprofit in Puerto Rico for a year, and lived in New York City and Long Beach, California.

After settling in Iowa where her husband attended medical school, she earned her MFA from the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers. *The Shore* originally began as her thesis and took her twelve years to write.

"I didn't focus on publication but on developing the story during that time," she said, and after drafting two previous versions of her man-

uscript, she knew she had to revise and include the perspectives of three narrators: Margot, Liz, and Evy. "I had to figure that out myself, and it was risky because you don't get a million chances to get it right," Runde explained, "but it's how this story works best." While she doesn't have a favorite character, she smiled when admitting she loved creating Evy's concurrent teenage and faux on-line middle-aged voices.

Following a multi-city book tour and several visits to Seaside Park to visit her mother and family this summer, Runde returned to Iowa City with her husband and two daughters, where she is currently working on a new project. *The Jersey Shore*, however, will always be the place where her story began.

Runde's distinctive perspective and exceptional resilience shine through Margot, Liz, and Evy Dunne, and in the end, *The Shore* emphasizes the strength of family, the influence of living by the beach, and the power of unconditional love. ♦

For more information about Katie Runde and her debut novel, *The Shore*, visit www.katierundewriter.com.