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# A Whale Hunt: How a Native-American Village Did What No One Thought It Could

By Robert Sullivan



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## A Whale Hunt: How a Native-American Village Did What No One Thought It Could By Robert Sullivan

For centuries the hunting of the whale was what defined the Makah, a Native American tribe in Neah Bay, but when commercial whaling drove the gray whale to near extinction in the 1920s, the Makah voluntarily discontinued their tradition and hung up their harpoons. In 1994, after the gray whale was taken off the endangered species list, the Makah decided to hunt again. The problem was that all the old whalers were dead -- no one knew how to go about hunting a whale. *A Whale Hunt* chronicles the two years Robert Sullivan spends with the Makah as they prepare for and stage the first hunt. Combating tribal infighting and inexperience, they must also face passionate, furious animal rights activists and swarming reporters. Before the ragtag group of hunters even pursues a whale, there are clashes, disappointments, and defeats, small triumphs and unexpected heroes.

A book of many layers and revelations, *A Whale Hunt* is the story of the demise and attempted resurrection of a Native American nation and of the individuals on the reservation whose lives are forever changed.



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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1999, a small armada of animal rights activists, TV crews and Coast Guard ships swarmed around a canoe off the coast of Washington State carrying seven Makah Indians as they hunted and killed a gray whale for the first time in living memory. The activists were attempting to halt the slaughter of an animal only recently removed from the endangered species list, while the Makahs were reviving a whaling tradition that had been dormant for generations. For visiting journalist Sullivan (who made a splash last year with his quirky natural and social history of *The Meadowlands of New Jersey*), it was an irresistible story. Sullivan—who writes like a hipper, edgier William Least Heat Moon and spent two years with the Makah—gives a kind of outsider's insider view of the hunt's preparation and aftermath, from the private anxieties of the tribespeople to the external pressure from the U.S. government, which insisted that the whale be killed "humanely" with a bullet in the brain immediately after the harpoon strike. He also provides funny commentary on subjects like neighboring Seattle ("a city filled with people who walk around in technologically advanced outdoor fabrics") and the too-easily ridiculed animal rights protesters. But Sullivan never quite communicates why the whale hunt was so important to him personally, or what it really meant to the Makah themselves. Did they actually hope to restore tribal heritage and pride? Or were they merely aiming to get rich by selling whale meat to the Japanese, as the animal rights protestors alleged? Sullivan mostly ducks these questions, which may disappoint those who come to this wry and sympathetic account for a hard-hitting look at the issues it raises, rather than to ride along with its engaging author. (Oct.)

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From [Booklist](#)

The Makah are a Native American tribe living on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington. The gray whale is a migratory cetacean, hunted for generations by the Makah and other coastal tribes until it was nearly driven extinct by commercial whaling. A moratorium on all hunting of the gray whale was declared, and the Makah had not hunted whales in 70 years. In 1995 the gray whale was taken off the endangered species list, and the Makah began a legal battle to resume whaling. There was only one problem: all of the old whalers were dead, and the tribe had to reinvent the techniques and traditions of whaling. Sullivan, a former newspaper reporter, spent two years with the Makah as they built a whaling canoe, chose and trained a crew, and taught themselves how to catch and kill a 35-45 foot sea mammal. Along the way, animal-rights activists, the Coast Guard, a German film crew, other Native Americans, and a fleet of reporters get involved, so that by the time the Makah hunters try for their first whale a fullfledged media circus is well underway, with the hunts and the reactions of the protestors being carried on live TV. Sullivan's wry reporting, with sympathy for all of the participants in the hunt (including the whales), puts the reader right into the midst of the action. No matter where one stands on the subject of aboriginal whaling rights, this book will be fascinating reading. *Nancy Bent*

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Review

Jonathan Raban *The New York Review of Books* A book that is at once enthralling, fair-minded, and very funny.

Nathaniel Philbrick *The New York Times Book Review* Marvelous...Sullivan has a very Ishmael-like talent for being both funny and generous, and at times *A Whale Hunt* reads like *Cool Runnings* meets *Northern Exposure*.

Larry McMurtry A good book about the difficulties of keeping a cultural and tribal tradition alive in the present day. Mr. Sullivan's account is sensitive, moving, and sad.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Norberto Brody:**

This A Whale Hunt: How a Native-American Village Did What No One Thought It Could are usually reliable for you who want to become a successful person, why. The reason why of this A Whale Hunt: How a Native-American Village Did What No One Thought It Could can be on the list of great books you must have is giving you more than just simple looking at food but feed anyone with information that possibly will shock your earlier knowledge. This book is handy, you can bring it everywhere you go and whenever your conditions throughout the e-book and printed people. Beside that this A Whale Hunt: How a Native-American Village Did What No One Thought It Could giving you an enormous of experience including rich vocabulary, giving you trial of critical thinking that we all know it useful in your day activity. So , let's have it and revel in reading.

#### **Samuel Travis:**

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#### **Richard Shumate:**

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#### **Dennis Lewis:**

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