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# The Queen Of Whale Cay: The Eccentric Story Of "Joe" Carstairs, Fastest Woman On Water



## Synopsis

When Marion "Joe" Carstairs died in 1993 at the age of ninety-three, she was largely forgotten. During the 1920s she held the world record as the fastest female speedboat racer. But as journalist Kate Summerscale discovered, when researching an obituary for the Daily Telegraph, Carstairs was also a notorious cross-dresser who favored women and smoked cheroots. Supremely self-confident, she inherited a Standard Oil fortune and knew how to spend her money--on fast boats and cars, female lovers, and a Caribbean island, Whale Cay, where she reigned over a colony of Bahamians. There, far from her bohemian past in London and Paris, she hosted a succession of girlfriends and celebrities, including Marlene Dietrich and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Through it all, she remained devoted to Lord Tod Wadley, a little doll who became her bosom companion. Already a bestseller in England, *The Queen of Whale Cay* is a marvelous portrait of one of the twentieth century's great eccentrics.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While I find the story of Joe Carstairs fascinating, I find Summerscale's attempt at explaining this enigma falls short of the mark. I believe there must be many others with far greater experience as writers/biographers, and even some who knew Carstairs personally, who would have been better qualified to tell this story. Summerscale's naivete and general lack of knowledge about the period during which Carstairs made her mark is glaringly obvious throughout much of the book. Her attempt to write this story became an education for herself, worthwhile, but of no service to her

readers. I would have appreciated more insight and less supposition. I also find her attempts to turn everything Carstairs did or made into a metaphor for self-imposed exile a bit hard to swallow. Carstairs was no recluse--she was quite the opposite; an exhibitionist extraordinaire.

Marion "Joe" Carstairs is someone impossible to forget once you've been properly introduced and this book is a fine introduction to her fascinating life. Heiress, racing-boat enthusiast, owner and lord of her own island fiefdom, Ms. Carstairs is brought to life through excellent research and exposition. A woman of great eccentricity, great talent, and great generosity, she amazes the reader with her boldly-lived existence and her determination never to deviate from her own principles, no matter who thinks what of them. Kate Summerscale has done a masterful job of putting many small and sometimes obscure pieces together to create a whole that is larger than the sum -- which, she admirably demonstrates, is what "Joe" Carstairs was all about. *THE QUEEN OF WHALE CAY* is both reportorial and whimsical, striking the right balance between the exterior world in which Ms. Carstairs moved about and an interior world which she held dearly secret from everyone except a little, foot-high male doll. In the hands of a clumsy writer, Ms. Carstairs' life could have been trotted out as mere burlesque, a novel diversion inviting smirks and ridicule. In the capable hands of Ms. Summerscale, however, the exuberant life of this wonderfully different woman shines. Marion "Joe" Carstairs would not have wanted her biography written at all, but if it had to happen, one suspects she would have been pleased with *THE QUEEN OF WHALE CAY*.

What an odd duck!!! Joe Carstairs was really unusual. She had an awful childhood, but overcame this with an independent spirit. She loved a "doll" all her life. She was the owner of Whale Cay and ran it like a dictator. The biography includes her many lovers, photographs, the story of her boat racing, her adventures during World War One, her friends, her businesses, her poetry, her pranks, her cruelty, her weird lifestyle, and more. Highly recommended. I have now read all of Kate Summerscale's books and will definitely buy her newest one - due soon. This book is short and is weird in places but it deserves an A+++++

I saw this slim volume in the store and was fascinated by the picture on the cover - a woman dressed as a man with a little battered doll on her shoulder - "what in the world is this?" So, I started to read. What a surprise. This is the story of Marion "Joe" Carstairs, a Standard Oil heiress, a champion speed boat driver, friend to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, an unrepentant lesbian, owner of the Caribbean island Whale Cay, and the constant companion of Lord Todd Wadley (yes,

a funny little doll). This is one of the most immediately engaging books I've ever read. What a character she was, and what a life she led. "The Queen of Whale Cay" is an absolute charmer from start to finish. Looking for a little slice of forgotten history to while away some time? This is the book for you.

Nominated for the Whitbread Biography of the Year Prize. A short but very detailed and interesting life of a woman who had wealth and no fear! She was also a hero in rescuing the sailors of the *Potlatch*. An American ship that was torpedoed off Bird Rock Passage, 350 miles from Naussau. She was poorly rewarded for her brave efforts.

The author makes the most of a truly eccentric life - American lesbian "Joe" Carstairs - who lived the life of a wealthy English lord and sportsman through the 1920s and 1930s - went everywhere, knew everyone - then gave it up to create her own truly bizarre island kingdom in the Bahamas. "Joe" drove an ambulance in WWI, was in Ireland for the troubles, burned a swathe through dozens of actress lovers across Europe, including some famous names of the day, drank and danced through the London nightclubs, designed built and professionally sailed schooners, yachts, racing boats...and the best part? Her only longterm partner in life, Lord Tod Wadley, was a little man DOLL (yes, a doll) whom she never allowed to leave her side for a moment. Wait til you see Lord Tod's photographs! No one could ever make this stuff up. The author gives enough historic and biographical background about Joe's times and the people in her circle, to make Joe's world almost as interesting a character as Joe herself. An unusual, hilarious, touching little book.

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