The Island Reader
anthology of Maine
island artists & writers

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Front cover image
by
Alyson Peabody, Matinicu

Title page image
by
Sally Rowan, Islesford
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The Island Reader offers islanders a platform for creative self-expression. For instance, Islesford and Little Cranberry are the same island but used interchangeably throughout this anthology. Using the island names submitted by artists is The Island Reader’s way of honoring island identity.
Letter from the Editors

Many thanks for choosing *The Island Reader*.

Here you’ll find the subtle or, sometimes, blatantly obvious wit and lightheartedness that are essential for living on any one of Maine’s unbridged islands.

As islanders, we rely on our wit to get us through the day. What can make island wit so special is that we can find it in the most unexpected and unusual places.

You’ll also find our islanders’ more serious side in the mix.

We want to thank our contributors who graced us with their creative talents. You live on fourteen islands along the coast from Casco Bay to the Cranberry Isles. *The Island Reader* couldn’t exist if it weren’t for you.

We want to thank Maine Seacoast Mission for supporting and encouraging the publication of this anthology for the past fourteen years. The Mission’s generosity unites our creative voice and allows us to share it with others.

And finally, we thank our readers. We hope you find your own sense of wit and lightheartedness in these pages.
Volume 14 is dedicated to previous editors of *The Island Reader*.

Thanks for keeping this boat afloat.

Anne Bardaglio, Matinicus  
Rob Benson, Mount Desert  
Kate Chaplin, Islesford  
Donna Cundy, Monhegan  
Kaitlyn Duggan, Islesford  
Alex Harris, Isle au Haut  
Livka Farrell, Monhegan  
Kathie Fiveash, Isle au Haut  
Rebecca Lenfestey, Frenchboro  
Ann Marie Maguire, Swan’s Island  
Erica Millette, Monhegan  
Eva Murray, Matinicus  
Susanna Roe, Swan’s Island  
Sally Rowan, Islesford *  
Scott Sell, Frenchboro  
Kate Shaffer, Isle au Haut  
Molly Siegel, Isle au Haut  
Skip Stevens, Islesford

*This is Sally’s final year as editor for *The Island Reader*. 
Ocean Office

(Inspired by clickbait headline: “15 Careers to Make the Ocean Your Office”)

I conjure my desk anchored in the sea, some kind of buoy or platform setup afloat among the Cranberry Isles,

popping seasickness pills as I try to fill in an Excel spreadsheet waves washing over my loafers

seagulls landing on laptop. The mailboat passes and I hail bewildered passengers who

wonder how they could work so remotely, how I can charge my cellphone, what the commute

is like. They will return to the city with a vision in their heads while I ride the white caps

and lick salt off my lips.

Carl Little
Great Cranberry Island
Shoreline

On the point stands a tree
Her flesh eaten away at the feet
Bone and sinew remaining
Bark shell struggling to stand erect against the wind,
Twisted, turning, forming an anguished outline of empty space
Midpoint, a handstand
Remarkably stable given the age of the acrobat,
still flouncing branched skirts like a dancer

Sam Hunneman
poem & image
Chebeague Island
Greenhouse Neighbors

In chilly autumn stillness
They gently intertwine
And share friendly whispers
To pass the darker time.

As crickets sing beneath them
To summer’s last salute
They race against the Father Time
To yield their precious fruit.

Katya Mocarsky
poem & image
Islesford
Not no for an answer

Though others will, and do,
I won't take it, at least in secret
where all my hopes, dreams,
and answers lie ready
for speaking out,
showing courage,
honing the sharp words,
to cut cords of bondage,
even chains of steel
and twisted cables.
My soul cries freedom
for those who want so worldly much
with wild-eyed wishes
like demons in a dark forest,
trees old and mossy
born yearning for sunlight but shaded
by shadowy branches
and dark birds swooping.
My soul and spirit will break all that,
burst out into the sunlight, and just before bursting out free,
will reach for you and both, as one, our answer will be yes.

Thruston Martin
Islesboro
Our New Cranberry Road
after Rachel Field

I wish I were walking the Cranberry Road,
moon motes fluttering through the trees,
where blueberries nestle in every field
and every path runs down to the sea.

Sundew, blue flag and pitcher plants
sing far out on the mysterious heath,
deer whisper under fairy apple trees
and monarchs flutter on the breeze.

There’s plenty of time to say hello
to wanderers from all over the World,
who happily walk the Cranberry Road
and remember it wherever they go.

Paul Averill Liebow
Great Cranberry Island
Dave Dyer
Islesboro
Lobsterman Entanglement

He woke up, Myers rum and Diet Coke still on his breath. He turned his radio on to hear the marine weather forecast.

A robotic voice came through the VHF radio, “Penobscot Bay: Northwest winds, 15 to 20 knots. Seas 2 to 4 feet.”

He shuffled to the coffee and drove his Geo Tracker to the westernmost point of the island, where the lighthouse stood tall, breathing in every painted lick of morning mist.

He looked out of his dark brown eyes surrounded in coils of sun-spent skin at the morning rising on the ocean.

He picked up his flip-phone and dialed his stern person.

I lay in bed, five comforters deep in dream, “Da nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nah nahh!” This ring tone has got to go. To keep it from singing its horrible song I smashed all of the buttons to answer it.

“Cait, you awake?”

“Yup,” I said like every other morning.

“Be over there in 20 minutes.” Jerry snapped his phone shut.

We simultaneously rolled down over the rock driveway, Jerry in his Tracker and me in my Jeep, which led us to the wharf where Jerry moored his boat. The sky was red and the harbor was perfect and particular. Puffs of smoke rose from the few houses that were awake and small headlights wound away from their driveways. Jerry’s boat—the *Lunette Christina*—was right in the middle of all the beauty, turning rocket red from the rising sun.

We thumped down the ramp and hopped into Jerry’s Zodiac. I flipped the outboard engine’s switch to the ‘Run’ position, pulled out the choke, and yanked on the cord; this piece of crap never starts.

Jerry yelled out, “Damn thing always ran great, and she’s been sunk four times!” He said that every morning.
I shouted in my mind, “I think it’s time for a new one!” and didn’t stop shouting until the engine kicked in and sent us flying to the Lunette Christina.

Jerry named his boat after his 90-year-old mother, so I asked, “How come you never named any of your boats after your wife Jerry?”

“Oh,” he said, with a sideways smirk, “that’s ‘cause I knew I wasn’t going to keep her.” His eyes smiled and he laughed to himself.

We struggled to get into the Lunette Christina and our oil pants. He flipped the main switch, turned the key and pushed the starter: nothing. In a half hour’s time, Jerry replaced the starter and fired the engine up. I walked the rail to the bow and released the mooring. Jerry gave the ole Lunette the sauce and she leaned so far back it looked like she was hydroplaning; Jerry loved to run her hard, mostly with an audience.

We cruised seven long miles out where the rope is plenty and the lobsters are so deep offshore they feel warm when they come to the surface. This was the same routine all day, and my face said it all. Jerry hauled up the buoy, ran the rope through the hauler, we picked the lobsters out of the traps, I replaced the empty pockets with fresh pockets full of herring and we set the pair of traps back out again.

Jerry turned to me and noticed I didn’t have a knife in the sheath attached to the shoulder strap of my oil pants. We always kept knives on us in case one of us got caught in the rope and went overboard with the traps.

“Cait, you’re missing your knife. Here, take mine.” Jerry handed me the knife from his own oil pants. Jerry is an expert of his kind and anticipates a good surprise, loves a good story and he could talk about anything all day. He mostly liked to tell me about the women he was seeing off island, all of them a third of his age and busty.

It took us almost an hour to get near Mount Desert Rock. This is whale territory.
Jerry wanted to move 30 traps inland and we got ready to pile them on. Each time we took a pair of traps onto the boat I stacked them inside the stern, and we left the rope underfoot on the deck until Jerry eventually stood on a mound of rope, making this short man a tall one. We loaded the boat full of traps and stuck the last two on the rail: not a safe travel location. Jerry put the boat in gear, climbed to 17 knots and cruised closer to shore.

Jerry, the craftsman that he is, placed routine first and fatally underestimated his susceptibility to surprise. Like this lobsterman friend of Jerry’s, the previous year, chopped the tip of his pinky finger off. He ran the line through the hauler and he looked down and before he knew it, he was missing the tip of his pinky finger, it happened just like that.

Jerry was at the helm, and like a serpent king seemingly he emerged from this seaweed covered rope beehive. I never stood inside the house with Jerry if I didn’t have to, because the sound that echoes from the engine down-bow was enough to make you “diesel deaf.” This was always my favorite anyway; leaning up against the bait box and looking backward at the tracks we had just laid in wake.

Up and down, up and down, from the radio a tidal wave of Dick Dale’s surfer riffs plucked something hot and sunny. If I relaxed to drop my head back and face to the sun I might have missed everything. It was almost to the point when the boat went up the traps were on the rail, and when the boat came down the traps jumped ship!

In one second I yelled out, “Jerry!” and the hair on Jerry’s neck snaked around his head as he turned his ear to me. Like an anchor the traps were sinking to the bottom of the ocean in one direction and the *Lunette Christina* was pushing like a racehorse with a broken leg in the opposite direction. The rope uncoiled itself until it jerked when it had its body laced around Jerry’s legs. Jerry was yanked like a kite catches wind. As Jerry blurred by, I ran to the
helm and sloppily launched my hands into the controls and stopped the boat better than a ledge could. Tears came instantly from my face, just to mix in with the hundreds of other salty drops all over my head. Tripping over the stupid frigging rope I fell to Jerry’s level. There he was, a man that stood 12 hours a day, was below me helpless with his legs pointing in every direction.

“Jerry, are you all right?” I said, but how could anyone be all right in a situation like this?

“I’m okay, Cait; I think I broke my legs.” Oh no, no, no I thought, for I always liked getting in early but this was a terrible way to go about it.

“Could you straighten my legs out, Cait?” Jerry said calmly; he never had much of a temper. I pulled one leg straight, and then the other. The rope had ripped his boot off, and his now-swelling foot was wet, cold and stuck to a dirty sock. I used the VHF radio to call a nearby lobsterman to help get Jerry upright, and we just waited; there was nothing left to think about, and Jerry couldn’t even bring himself to joke about this one. So we sat and kicked ourselves for not having done something differently.

While we waited I decided I would haul the traps back, the ones that almost took Jerry overboard. I never did much of Jerry’s job, so I barely knew how to use the hauler to bring the two traps up. I hauled up the buoy, ran the rope through the hauler and produced a black kink: Jerry’s boot was pinched between a loop of rope, so tight you couldn’t fit a grasshopper’s leg in it.

“Look at this, Jerry; that was your foot.” Filled with water the boot was a grim symbol. Jerry let out a laugh, and I thought to myself, oh, this will be a good story for his women.

Caitlin Trafton
Swan’s Island
Alissa Messer
Matinicus
Seashell Song

Seashell, seashell,
Sing me a song.
A song about friendship,
A song about peacefulness,
Sing me a song.

Seashell, seashell,
Sing me your song.
Your song of waves splashing,
   Ever near
Your song of peacefulness.
   Sing me your song.

Anica Messer
poem & image
Matinicus
Ann Marie Maguire
Swan’s Island
When This Day Is Over

this storm, these clouds
heavy with the fate
of this small island –
the downed power lines,
refrigerators thawing
while the houses grow cold
and the postmaster keeps watch
in a room without mail,
while spruce branches break
under the weight of snow
and the hum of generators
muffles the low roar of surf –
we will shovel out and
toss the meat gone bad,
debrief in the quiet of our kitchens.
When this day is over.

Ralph Skip Stevens
Islesford
Sharon Whitham
Great Cranberry Island
The sound was deafening. Thousands of rocks churned as the ocean’s waves crashed down. They were dragged from the shore to the cove’s bottom to be thrashed, rolled, and tumbled before being pushed back on to the shore.

I sat on a large piece of driftwood that had once been a tree rooted on the edge where land meets the sea. Everything in my mind that had caused sleepless nights and constant frustration for what seemed like days muted. I sat there, entranced by the turmoil before me.

The dark grey-green wall that would surge, crash, shift everything in its path slipped away. It left a white foamy path that dissolved as the wave mustered the energy to rush to the shore again.

On either side of the cove, there were protruding ledges with sharp-angled rocks. Weather and sea had broken away pieces over time. The storm surge had battered the surface so hard that pieces of the rock ledge broke under the force.

Those pieces had tumbled to the ocean floor.

Some days the broken rock just rested in the sand, shifting ever so slightly. Above the surface of the water, blue skies and calm seas gave pause until the push and pull began again.

Some days the sky would be brilliant blue with wispy pure white clouds.

Some days the clouds were thick, grey, billowing and angry.

An unseen force pushed the broken piece of ledge out of the sand, slamming it against large underwater boulders and rocks. This caused it to get wedged between sharp ledges covered by a pillow of seaweed that brushed the broken piece gently, even though the seawater continued to batter it.
Each push and pull eventually freed the broken ledge. It was dragged further into the cove. Tumbling. Rolling.

Watching the turbulence reminded me of how my life had been like that broken ledge. Personal life choices and events left me broken and tumbling. At times I felt stuck and wedged between two choices. After I made my decision, I’d be sent out into the sand where I couldn’t predict what might happen next.

Some days felt calm and restful, but more often than not I was dragged out of the safety of the sand and tossed around with little control over where I ended up. There had been many sleepless nights, endless arguments and debates within my own mind that never created a resolution, only more sleepless nights. Life crashed down on me like the sea.

Days spent surrounded by the beauty of life with the brilliant sun sustained me.

Seagulls soared above, effortlessly riding the wind currents. They hovered above the seaweed-covered ledge and rocks looking for a meal that might have crawled to safety above the ocean surf or that might have been forced there. They were seemingly unaware of the crashing waves as they surged, shifted and rolled.

I stood up and began walking across the rocky banking. All of the rocks were round and oval. They contrasted the broken jagged ledge on the cove edge.

I picked up one of the rocks and rolled it around on the palm of my hand. The pointed corners had been smoothed. Where did this broken piece of ledge begin from? How many storms had it thrashed and tumbled around on the bottom before it ended up here?

I closed my hand around the rock and felt how solid I am.

Kimberly Peabody
Matinicus Island
Kat Farrin
Peaks Island

Laurie Webber
Matinicus Island
Ol’ Tud

remember when men were men
and when they set out to sea
let’s remember them

Ol’ Tud was tough
he could sew a sail
on a barrel
on a deck
as the winds did wail
throw a harpoon
at a shark or a whale
from the bow of a scow
in the mighty howl
of a merciless gale

far from land
hand over hand
he’d pull in cod
on a trawl, he’d set
no fear in him
for his maker, he’d met
after all, “the Man” was
no more than a following sea
and heaven no more
than an island’s lee

damp in his wool and oilskins
just like a fish with fins
Ol’ Tud
was comfortable in his water-logged skin

he might take off
his boots for a spell
the scales and his feet
made a beautiful smell
rocked back and forth
by the constant swell
into his bunk
for an hour he’d crawl,
but even in his bunk
he’d haul and haul

Jack Merrill
Islesford

Janet Moynihan
Matinicus
Markey’s at noon

Pups peppered in sand run the shoreline
to the ledges and back.
They have no interest in balls or sticks, just the
waves splashing against their August paws.

I lie on a towel marked with cornerstones
to prevent the wind from trying to carry it away.
I flip through poetry, lying on my stomach
lapping up verses while my parents sip summer ale.

Island living exposed a need
I must now feed endlessly
with fresh blackberries and salty surf,
coming back every evening for the setting sun.

Alyson Peabody
Matinicus Island
Bat in the Maine House

The house had settled down for the night about ten-thirty. I was closing up downstairs, turning off all but one light. I heard the bathroom door open and close a few times.

Then a shriek came from upstairs, then feet running, voices calling, “What is it, what is it?” The word ‘BAT’ rang out from one of the parents, followed by more screams and words. “It’s a bat…it’s a bat,” a chorus of voices called.

I rushed up the stairs.

“OPEN THE OFFICE DOOR,” my son Rich yelled from his room. I flipped it open and stood out of the way in a nearby bedroom. Rich came out of another bedroom waving his arms. I could see the bat in front of him. He was trying to steer the bat into the office without letting it make a turn to go upstairs to the third floor, or downstairs where it would be impossible to corner.

“We got him in there now,” Rich said, as he closed the door firmly. “We’ll put him out tomorrow.”

Holly, Rich’s wife, described to all of us gathered in the hall how the bat flew around Rich’s head and right in his face.

“It was probably just scared,” she said. “It was a small bat, maybe a baby.”

“I’m going to sleep with covers over my head, my granddaughter Sylvie announced. “I’ve heard bats like human hair.” Hers was long and silky. I understood her worry, even if it was a myth.

The house was quiet until morning, and I first heard someone making coffee about seven. As soon as I smelled it might be done, I went down, careful to be as quiet as possible.

My son was at his computer, checking out bat videos. He’d found one made in Ireland. Rich ran it again, and I held back my desperate need to keep laughing as the
residents of a small cottage ran hither and dither trying to escape a bat swooping back and forth across their living room. They sought safety under sofa cushions, in small wall closets and back in the kitchen until the bat swooped in there. Why didn’t anyone go outside? (It was Ireland, so it was probably raining.)

Rich asked if I thought we could do a film while we searched the office for the bat. He’s a filmmaker, so he always enjoys opportunities to get new footage. He thought he could do it on his iPhone,

“Well, would it be as funny without the Irish accent?” I asked.

“We could practice,” Rich said. He imitated the father in the video directing the family around the room, swatting with a broom when it came near the door, which he never opened to let the bat out. He was very funny.

I tried a few words and laughed at myself. Despite my Irish grandparents, I was hopeless at the brogue on first try.

Rich said he wanted to film finding the bat and releasing it out the windows. We decided to look more closely in the office to make sure it hadn’t slipped out a crack in the front window overnight. We were hesitant to move things around in the office, but we looked at each other when we realized there was a small space behind a large painting on one wall.

“Don’t touch it yet,” I said.

“Okay, we’ll tell the kids at breakfast. Get your coffee and keep a watch on the office.”

At the top of the stairs, there was a small window that looked into the office when it might have served as the maid’s quarters. From the window she could have seen down the stairs into both the living room and kitchen. If she were needed, she was close at hand.

While Rich checked his iPhone’s battery, I stood near the office door and got the two younger kids into positions where they could watch through the window.
Holly would enter the room and begin by looking through papers on the desk, then a possible hideout, a crammed closet in the corner of the room, with its door open just a crack. The oldest boy, Casper, would be ready to open the double windows and screens if anything was found. Rich directed the search as the closet was emptied, while I stood with the two younger kids, looking into the room from the stairs. Holly and Rich were good with the Irish brogue, and we giggled offstage.

Holly went in the room and started to look through desk papers and boxes, then approached the closet. She kept up a lively banter, punctuated with funny comments on the useless or old things like kids’ early drawings and a dated book of sewing machine directions. Best of all, she pulled out a wing-shaped black vacuum cleaner attachment.

“Is this the bat?” she asked, We could hardly contain ourselves, it looked so much like a bat.

Then Rich signaled that it was time to move to the wall picture, and he gave me the camera to continue filming while he joined the search.

“Let’s look behind this canvas,” he said. “Okay now, all of youse be quiet, no more laughing out there.”

He told Holly to take the other side of the painting as he gently lifted it from the hook two feet above him.

“Okay now, turn it over…. He’s here! See!” He pointed at a dark black triangle down close to Holly, in her corner.

“Oh, he’s so sweet, so little and scared.” I loved her empathy.

Those huddled on the stairs moved into the doorway behind me to see the bat wedged in the wooden cross made by the painting’s stretchers.

“We should let him go,” Holly said. “We can open these double windows and tip the painting out.”

Casper lifted the lock to open the screens and swing them aside. Then he opened the window lock to swing the glass windows wide to the outside.
Slowly, Holly moved backwards and Rich followed and turned the canvas painting in a semicircle to tip it around the central strut of the double window.

They got the whole painting out of the window, moving it carefully together around the center brace.

Excitement grew as Holly coaxed the bat to move by tapping the underside of the canvas.

“Go’ on now, fella,” Rich said in his pseudo, Irish brogue.

Suddenly, the bat, really small, rose from the canvas and flew straight off the painting into the woods.

“Oh, wasn’t he wonderful,” Holly said.

“Couldn’t we have kept him, Ma?” Casper said, picking up the Irish.

We hadn’t had all our breakfast. While we ate we begged Rich to show us the video. He promised us a showing of our efforts soon.

“Just a little editing first,” Rich said.

In the afternoon we watched the You Tube Irish video, then our own version of the bat encounter. Rich had speeded up Holly’s cleanout of the closet and fixed the audio. We loved how it went. The fake brogues were as laughable as the originals.

“We were almost as funny,” everyone agreed. “Put it on YouTube,” the kids begged.

“First we’ll show a few friends,” Rich said. He was pleased with the morning’s fun.

Nancy Hoffman
Islesboro
Peggy’s Driftwood

I once stood stately
guarding coasts away
from Jericho Bay,
and though time has
had its way
I survive in chiseled beauty
sprouting now
from jagged rock ---
brilliantly cleansed by
sunshine and rime.
Death did not stop me.
I’m where I dreamt
I’d be ---
lolling, gracefully,
by the edge of
this singing sea,
dancing with its spray,
baptized by its beauty.

Wesley Staples
Poem & image
Swan’s Island
Bettina Stammen
Vinalhaven
The Vinalhaven Ferry

Every summer my family and I pack our bags and travel six hours north to a small island 15 miles off the coast of Rockland, Maine. As you approach the small island the fresh cool breeze smells of salt; when you round the turn into the harbor you see the crystal blue water splash against the rocky shore and hear the ferry blow its horn as if it was excited to finally reach its destination. After all the chaos of the ferry workers getting every car off the boat, we drive up the small hill towards our little house. Everyone going the other way is smiling and waving. It finally feels like we are home.

Claire Buckley
Poem & image
VinalHaven
Island Kindness

Uck, sick, winter ills
Achy, sneezy, wheezy all
Gift of chicken noodle soup
Not Campbell's mmm good
The real thing

Chicken chunks, carrots and noodles too
Floating in glistening chicken broth
So good. Very good, healing broth
Such a special gift
Thank you dear friend
For the elixir of body repair
Homemade chicken noodle soup.

Karen Griffin
Swan’s Island
Laura Venger
Frenchboro
Yellow Moon

A foggy island ten miles off the coast of Maine, a pocket beach, early morning. I poke through the detritus washed up on the sand: sea-worn pebbles and beach glass, mussel shells, discarded lobster claws and the rubber bands that held them closed, disintegrating bait bags, fragments of bricks from old chimneys, pottery shards, lemon rinds, fish bones, a rusted bolt, glistening strands of seaweed. The sea offers many gifts. I'm seeking fingernail-sized yellow periwinkles.

pottery shard

stamped "Homer"

stories of the sea

I tuck each periwinkle I find into my pocket until I have a whole handful of yellow, unlike any other color on this beach—a hopeful, lunar yellow with a little seawater trapped inside like a microscopic sloshing tide. To what small ear can I hold up this shell? What distant ocean will sing from its spiraling core?

spring full moon

hidden by fog

the tide knows

Each shell’s an empty house, absent now of whatever consciousness a snail possesses. A jangling heap of periwinkle shells rattling in my pocket, tiny exoskeletons of calcium carbonate. I shake them out onto the sand as if their pattern could reveal some kind of augury. If only I knew what to ask.
his song amplified
by morning fog
yellow warbler

Kristen Lindquist
Monhegan Island

Katya Mocarsky
Islesford
My friend Bud Perry once said to me, “You haven’t learned much until you sink your first boat.” His advice fell on deaf ears; at the time, I didn’t own a boat. My wife Sandi, knowing how absent-minded I can be, didn’t want me to buy a boat. She reminded me that I regularly lose keys and wallets, my glasses and medical charts. If I bought a boat, would I run out of gas in the fog? Forget to charge the marine radio? Lose the navigational chart? Those sorts of things. And there’s this: For 16 weeks of the year, Casco Bay is a boating paradise. For the other 36 weeks only the larger lobster boats and draggers, oil tankers, and the Casco Bay Lines ferry move about in the harbor.

Of course, that was before I found the perfect boat, one that was 15 years old but with an almost new engine. I emphasized to Sandi that it had high gunnels, meaning the side walls were high enough that even our spirited three-year-old daughter couldn’t fall overboard. Better yet, the price was right, and it came with a boat trailer. With visions
of gunk-holing to the outer islands dancing in my head, I drove west from Portland to a farm in the western mountains of Maine. After cleaning out a case of empty Budweiser cans from the hull, the owner filled a garbage can with water and started the engine. It worked. Sold.

Bud Perry was a few days from discharge from the local rehabilitation hospital where he was recovering from the amputation of several toes. As I drove to the car ferry, I thought my boat might cheer him up. I pulled in. He was not pleased with the food, pain management, orderlies, x-ray technicians, lab techs, or the administration. Legally blind and on dialysis, the man was a “difficult admission.” Nursing quickly agreed that it would be best for everyone if I took Bud outside for some fresh air.

I found a wheelchair and rolled him through the automatic doors and stopped in front of the Sea-Whaler. He held up a hand to shield his eyes from the bright morning light. The dim outlines of the boat seemed to revive him.

“Well, well, well. You’ve finally bought yourself a boat. What kind of engine?” He straightened himself up in the wheelchair and leaned forward.

“Mercury, 90 horsepower. Two stroke. It’s only four years old,” I said.

Bud wheeled himself to the stern and ran a hand over the metallic outlines of the engine, working his way down to the lower unit. I knew I’d gotten a great deal and told him so. “Sixteen feet long, only $3,500 dollars. I’m heading from here to the public boat ramp and from there, out to Peaks.”

“Prop’s bent.”

“What?”

“The guy you bought it from rammed into something, bought a new propeller, but the prop is bent. You’re going to get a lot of vibration, and that’s going to tear apart the lower unit.” He ran a hand over the stern and noticed a thin crack and ran a finger over the wound.
“Probably when he did this. Fiberglass repair is piss poor.” He leaned forward and peered at the lettering one letter at a time. “Sea-Whaler. You bought a lake boat, a Sea-Whaler. Keep your life preserver on; you hit a ledge and this baby is going down like the Titanic, stern first.”

“So...you like the boat,” I joked. We both laughed. “You could have done worse.”

In hopes of increasing Sandi’s comfort zone, I signed up for a Coast Guard water safety course. True, due to scheduling conflicts, I only made two of the classes, but I read the book and passed the test, conflating my false sense of confidence. That summer, our family motored around Casco Bay in Sakamo (from the first two letters of Sandi and our two children, Kate and Molly) whenever I could squeeze out an hour or two from my island medical practice. I learned how to read a navigational map, how to tie a bowline to secure Sakamo to its mooring, and practiced “parking” on nearby docks until I could feather Sakamo in and safely load and unload passengers. I timed our trips to islands on an incoming tide so that we could safely beach Sakamo and explore abandoned forts and tunnels from the Civil War and World War II. I paid attention to the nautical map.

True, one afternoon I received a call that Sakamo was drifting in the channel after somehow coming loose from its mooring. And I did run aground on a sand bar when I was heading up the bay to visit a whale in Lovell’s Cove with Kate. We were marooned on Little Chebeague Island with my friend Geoff and his son, Brian, until we refloated Sakamo 6 hours later. When we returned to Peaks Island, Sandi was waiting on the beach, arms crossed, absolutely livid. Motoring in, I explained to Kate that, sure, we hit the sand bar, but maybe she could tell mommy about the fun things we did on Little Chebeague. Instead she jumped off the boat and ran to Sandi crying, “Mommy, I fell off my seat and hit my head. This is the worst day of my life!”
In mid-September, I ran into a busy stretch with house calls, clinic days, and hospitalized patients. When I looked up it was October. Next weekend, I thought, I’ll pull the boat, next weekend. Then it was November and a rush of arctic air flowed down from the north. My phone rang early one morning and a worried neighbor suggested that I check out my boat.

I bundled up and went down to the beach. Rain was pitching out of the sky sideways. Shielding my eyes I made out the gray outline of my Sea-Whaler as the rain shifted to stinging sleet. Closer to shore, just beyond the shore break, a raft of eiders rode out the storm. A long line of cormorants flew by, their wings skimming the surface of the churning waves. My eyes tracked northward and southward, up and down Diamond Pass. There were no other boats on the water; they’d been pulled weeks ago. Had I really been too busy to take the time to back my own trailer down the ramp and pull my boat? Yes, I’d been too busy. No, I hadn’t taken the time to do it anyway. Now I was paying the price. Visibility dropped as the sleet changed over to snow. I stepped closer to the edge of the surf line, up to my boot tops and watched my Sea-Whaler rock up and down on the mooring. A gray, white-capped wave lifted up the bow and sent it shuddering into a deep trough. Another wave rolled over the stern. The bow pointed skyward, like a forgetful finger. I blinked twice and the boat was gone.

It was time to go to work; clinic hours in 30 minutes. I dressed and cut through Snake Alley to the Island Health Center up Sterling Street.

Of course, up ahead, there was Bud Perry, perched on a stone wall. Over a red Mackinaw shirt, he wore an oversized purple parka with a tunnel hood, insulated boots, and a pair of gray, woolen mittens, but there was nothing wrong with his hearing. I was almost by him, tip-toeing really, because he was absolutely the last man on Peaks Island I wanted to talk to. Leaning forward to get a better
read of my silhouette he jabbed his lit pipe in my face, “Heard your boat sank.”

I looked at my watch. Thirty minutes had passed since Sakamo sank on its mooring.

“The wind’s supposed to flatten out tomorrow. If you call Dave Quimby, his boat, Speculation, has enough power to muscle Sakamo off the bottom. He can tow you to a boat ramp in Portland, and from there you can trailer it to one of the marinas. Seawater does a number on an engine but flushing it out with fresh water might work. Doubtful, but it’s worth a try.”

I wrote down Dave’s number.

“Aren’t you glad I’m your first patient today?” Bud rolled up his pants leg and revealed a swollen knee. Bending down, I removed a glove and palpated the red, warm surface and decided it was either gout or an infection. It would need to be drained.

The day passed quickly. I tapped the knee at the Island Health Center and identified uric acid crystals under the microscope—gout, and injected it with methylprednisolone, a steroid. A secession of sore throats, coughs, headaches, and bad backs and shoulders kept me busy through the morning. I was fortunate that I had an albuterol aerosol mist on hand to treat a 3 year old with an exacerbation of asthma, and a supply of liquid prednisolone for a particularly severe drug reaction to amoxicillin in a pre-teen. At noon, I called Dave Quimby. There was a pause on the other end when I explained that my boat sank on its mooring a few hours ago before he chuckled and agreed to help.

The next morning, the wind backed off. By the time I boarded Dave Quimby’s sturdy dive boat, Speculation, the temperature had ticked up into the high 40’s. Over the hum of the diesel motor, Dave explained that if we were lucky, my mooring ball would still be on the surface with my bottom-dwelling Sea-Whaler attached. I sat
despondently on a crate next to Dave’s diving gear and fiddled with a length of chain.

When we arrived at my mooring, *Sakamo* was still attached to the mooring line. Dave dropped a grappling hook into the water adjacent to the taut mooring line. He “fished” for my bow rail, explaining, “With any luck, I’ll catch your bow rail instead of the windshield.”

My friend Tux, who was onboard and had recently bought a boat of his own, whispered to me, “No way this works.”

Dave jiggled the grappling hook up and down. From time to time he declared that he felt the hook ‘scrape something.’ He was about to change into his diving gear, when the hook caught, and he cleated the heavy line to his stern. “Now’s the fun part,” Dave grinned. “I gun the engine, *Sakamo* slowly rises to the surface, water pours out, and we tow that baby to town.”

He slipped *Speculation* into gear and the metal work boat groaned forward. I imagined *Sakamo* on her resting plot. Was she bottom side up? Was Dave grinding my engine, my almost new 90 horse-power, bent prop Mercury, into the mud? Would she tear apart? *Speculation* picked up speed. The stern line played out. Dave turned round from the wheelhouse and shouted, “Here she comes!”

The surface churned as the windshield, then the bow-rail, gunnells, and lastly, the engine emerged, shedding water and mud. As we picked up speed, the boat came up on plane. I exhaled. Dave pointed *Speculation* towards Portland and we cracked open a celebratory beer. Unbelievable.

As we approached Portland, a marina truck backed down the public boat ramp, the trailer resting, half-submerged over the wheels. Dave lined up *Speculation* for the delivery. I gave a thumbs-up sign to the driver. As we slowed and made a gentle arc towards the ramp, the grappling hook shifted on the bow rail of *Sakamo* and the
boat suddenly flipped like a mortally wounded whale. Then
the boat disappeared. Only a dull, rainbow, oil sheen
stained the surface, marking the second, deeper, burial site.

It was the lesson that kept on giving. Eventually,
and it took the rest of the morning, we muscled the boat
onto the marina trailer. Dave declared that Sakamo looked
remarkably undamaged. A few days later, I took a call from
the marina during clinic hours. The repair manager wanted
me to know that they’d flushed the engine and managed to
get it started. The boat was dinged up, would require
considerable fiberglass work, but it was definitely fixable.
He wanted me to know that they’d cleaned out a lot of mud
when they removed the cowling from the engine. No
guarantees on the engine. It might be dependable, but then
again, rust might set in and, and, you know, it might conk
out when you least expect it. Hard to predict.

“So what are you saying?” I asked.

“Well, between hauling your boat on a Sunday,
flushing and trouble-shooting the engine, you’re seven
hundred dollars into it already.”

I rubbed my temple and tapped a finger on a chart.
Anne pushed a pen into my hand and asked me to sign a
prescription. She whispered that I had a call from the
hospital on the other line.

“Dr. Radis? You still there?”

“I’m here.”

“So we’ve got two options. We keep going; I can
give you a better estimate next week, or . . . we keep the
engine, give you back the boat, and call it a day. It’s a
wash. Done.”

They kept the engine. I trailered Sakamo back to
Peaks Island a few months later and sold her for $350 to a
guy on the island who knew how to do fiberglass work. The
next spring, I was boat-less and relaxing on the top deck of
the Peaks Island ferry when I struck up a conversation with
my neighbor the marine mechanic. He asked why I wasn’t
commuting on my boat. I retold him the story. When I got
to the part about the phone call from the repair manager, he, waved me off, and lowered his voice, “So we’ve got two options. We keep going, or we keep the engine and call it a day. It’s a wash.” He raised an eyebrow and said, “Am I right or am I right?”

I silently nodded.

“There’s never been a submerged engine that’s ever left that shop. It’s a racket. You know, there’s good money in used engines.”

Like Bud Perry said, I thought, “You haven’t learned much until you sink your first boat.”

Dr. Chuck Radis
story & image
Peaks Island

Dakota Flagg
North Haven
Allison and Molly’s swim around Isle au Haut to raise money for the Robinson Point Lighthouse restoration turned out to be the event of summer 2019 for islanders. Tim’s iPad sketch records the celebratory completion of the swim, and perhaps more importantly, the island community’s support.
Speech

With watchful voice the sea speaks
    Through flattened waves. In quiet succession
    ‘gainst slumbering rock, each lines up and breaks
    timidly, as if asking permission.

Oh, say and sigh
    and find saying in sighing
    low tide follows high
    and in living there’s dying.

In tomb-dark tones the rock replies
    crusted with life, wrapped in mist
    barnacle wedded to bearded gneiss
    both patiently waiting the ocean’s kiss.

Oh, say and sigh
    and find saying in sighing
    low tide follows high
    and in living there’s dying.

Sea and sky, round all enwheeling
    your voice is the tides and the hissing sand
    and the cry of the goshawk, reeling, reeling
    in circles above the mutinous land.

Oh, say and sigh
    and find saying in sighing
    low tide follows high
    and in living there’s dying.

Elsbeth Russell
Matinicus
Boats

Let us go to the harbor my son.
Let us see what we will see.
From the smallest dinghy
to a ship of the line,
each has its job,
each has its place,
each has its time.

Some are floating
party palaces.
Great garrulous carousels of fun,
they slip from port to port
looking, visiting, buying,
piling up destinations,
ticking them off effortlessly,
consuming everything.

Lobster boats,
tugboats, trawlers,
these have rust.
From a hard edged hunger,
wolfed in a gale,
food is consumed,
the bilges spew,
the diesels smoke
and the world is fed.

Sailboats are yar
and like horses,
made useless by the motor,
they are a specialty act now.
But disposable income
adores a pretty receptacle
and so they grace our midst,
gorgeous, high maintenance,
high spirited, delicate
badges of leisure.

Look, there's a scull,
that leanest of craft,
no baggage allowed,
no freeboard,
no comfort,
no rough seas,
unlike his hardier cousin
the kayak,
who seems to thrive
in adversity and plays
in the roughest waters.

We will see no battleship.
Our harbor is not deep enough,
our moorings not stout enough.
We cannot supply them.
Our small docks could not withstand
the thunder of boots,
the brawls and catcalls,
the disturbance of peace.
They must seek
the stoutest ports,
with bollards like
a granite molar.

There is our dingy,
modest little humbug of a shell.
The seas would swamp it,
only a drowning sailor
could love her lines.
She can transport
a bit more than the scull,
but less than the rest.
Modest in upkeep,
reach and humor,
she knows her displacement
and carries it well.

Which calls you my son
for call they do,
hear them you will
and go you must.

Weston Parker
Swan’s Island

Jacki McCreary
Islesford
Sensible

We touch in the dawn
Just that
Soft warm drowsy
Since it feels like happiness
Why hasten to rise.

Brian Arsenault
Long Island

Tricia Ladd
Islesboro
The Maypole

What better use
of an old house falling into ruin,
than for the fire company
to use it as a drill,
intentionally setting a destructive blaze,
practice for what we don’t want
to happen on our island.

Yet the lack,
the emptiness,
of what now seems
such a small footprint
for the former, large, storied house
sucks the air out
of my lungs.

We stand as if by a grave,
a leveled space - hardly anything left:
a large, round rock now exposed,
rolled down-slope,
one poured-concrete corner,
a floor joist fitting
poking out of the ash-ridden dirt

The tenacious apple tree
that greeted arrivals,
gone from its centerpiece locus,
all the little nooks and crannies,
obliterated,
even the asbestos-clad tool shed,
gone.
The surrounding spruce and pines weep.

I’m struck that my grief
includes another loss
of one
whose kindness, gentle humor,
and love of family, was ingrained as his tan,
apparent to all who cared to stop
and spend time in idle, deep conversation.
Words inadequate or poorly phrased
don’t come as easily as the eulogy
for the Maypole’s empty space.
Deep in the woods,
by the spruce where they found him,
a few keepsakes
clamor against the void.

Starr Cummin Bright
Little Cranberry Island

Paul Averill Liebow
Great Cranberry Island
Finding Fine Sand

To find Fine Sand, you must first know where to locate Swan’s Island - and to locate Swan’s Island, you must first know where to find the ferry terminal. In the southwestern most harbor of Mount Desert Island, you will drive along forest-lined roads, with the occasional souvenir shop, lobstah trap, and tourist spot (including an arched white bridge over a lily pond; the most-photographed place in Maine). These roads will seem to wind on without end, and your scant entertainment of trees and boats outside fishing homes will almost certainly grow tedious at some point. By the farthest reach of this island, you shall finally arrive at the humble fishing community of Bass Harbor. It is here you will find the ferry.

After you locate the misleading “dead end” sign (in truth, it’s merely a beginning), continue and place your car at the end of the line before you. There will likely be a variety of large trucks with yet larger personalities inside them, characterized by the wafting of cigarette smoke.

Pass these people and their rigs with nonchalance (intimidating looks are often deceiving), making your way to the white building with a flashing sign, reading: “I dusted once. It came back. Never doing that again.” This sign is a relatively new addition. I quite like it.

Open the door to a pleasant ding, and converse with the individual in management of ticketing. The prices are rather high despite Swan’s being a modest island. After having acquired your ticket, go back to your vehicle (hopefully lacking Massachusetts license plates) and wait. You will probably sit for a half-hour, only to miss the boat you had planned on boarding due to the aforementioned large trucks - but so it goes.

In the extra hour and a half it takes for the ferry to go out and back, you can meander down to the rocky beach at the fore of the building in which you bought your ticket. Be mindful while stepping down the rocks; not all of them
are as stable as they appear. From this pebbled vantage, you can watch the waves lap in lieu of staring at the ass-end of a battered truck. On a good day in the appropriate season, a harbor pup or three will also make their presence known. As your sights begin exhausting, the drone of the ferry will creep out from behind some distant landmass, signaling your time to climb up the hill and into your vehicle.

Sit in your driver’s seat with the window down, and a person in a neon-yellow vest will approach you and give their greeting; most often, “How’s your day goin’?” or “Hey there!” and put out their hand for your ticket. Oblige. They will firmly grasp the blueberry-colored piece of card stock and carefully tear along the perforated line, creating a sound much like a pulled zipper. It is one of the most lovely sounds my ears have had the honor of hearing. After they have handed you back your half, you are to drive down the ramp and onto the ferry.

Yet more people in yellow vests will greet you as you board, and one (who typically wears a New York Yankees hat, beige cargo shorts, and white New Balance sneakers) will authoritatively point at you. You both know who is in charge here. Follow his hand-arm directions for parking to the slightest muscle movement, lest he will yell: “No, no, no!” and you will feel very embarrassed among the rest of the seasoned folks surrounding you. Once you have successfully aligned in your parking space, wait while the Yankee hat-wearing man gets everyone else rectified. A slight whine will occur, which is the bridge from land to ferry rising. After this, the ferry’s engine will rumble to its truest extent, and you will be off.

The motor will sound like some guttural beast, bellowing its deepest baritone into your eardrums. The side effect of this, as I and many others have learned, is lethargy. Feel free to snooze. You will awake with a jolt as the black rubber bumpers of the Swan’s Island terminal pummel the side of the somniferous ferry. Bleary-eyed, you have found Swan’s Island.
After Yankee hat-wearing man directs you off the boat (following his directions to the slightest twitch of a muscle), follow the only road until it forks. Take a right. Continue taking rights on the paved main road until you reach a small wooden sign that reads: “Fine Sand Beach.” It will be on the left, following a large hill. Turn onto its gravel road and follow it until you reach the parking lot. You will know it when you see it; there is another sign. There are no dogs allowed, as yet another sign states, but if you have a pooch, you may disregard it like everyone else. It’s quite the opposite for fires; don’t burn down our island.

After unloading your car of the necessary assorted beach-going items, start the short tromp through the forest. It is a mixture of gravel, pine needles, and gnarled roots of which you’ve presumably never seen anything comparable. There is also bountiful mud - even in the summer. Avoid it. Admire the fields of moss and the collections of ferns and the chipmunks scampering and the other natural beauties you see as you travel, making sure not to step on them. Though the chipmunk would be hard to step on if you tried, that being said - don’t try.

Once you hear the ocean beating on land, you will know you’re close; a hundred more feet and you’re there. Stepping out of the dark forest, prepare to be blinded by the sun reflecting off the sand, scorching your retinas in saying “hello.” You, my fellow journeyperson, have found Fine Sand Beach. The sands are glad you’re here.

Adrian Lyne
Swan’s Island
Lauri Goldston
Swan’s Island

Adrienne Landry
Monhegan
Abandoned Outport

For thousands of years, inukshuks ("stone men") on high mountain ridges and visible far out to sea indicated that “here was a harbor”. As we sailed into this idyllic spot we saw a neat village curving around the shore, centered on a stunning waterfall with an old white church sited next to its top. A cemetery filled with weathered stones crowned a ridge to the right. A newer stone brightly festooned with colorful flowers stood out from swaying grasses.

We tied up at the government wharf, where a neat sign proclaimed the place as a “Tidy Towns Provincial Winner”. Cement walkways led around the cove, down to the wharves and fish houses, and up amongst brightly painted houses and the school. A couple of wharves sported plastic sheathed greenhouses. A bridge traversed the top of the waterfall, connecting both sides of the harbor.

We left our boat and walked up through the village in the fading afternoon sun. Wildflowers were everywhere, and we found a rich patch of cranberries where we were able to quickly pick a bagful for our dinner. At the top of the hill, just before the church and waterfall was a wooden frame in the shape of a Christmas tree, covered with electric Christmas lights. Next was a small building that proclaimed itself as the fire station, where firefighting tools were stored.

We entered the church and stood there in shock. Except for an altar rail and a small pump organ in the front, it was completely empty – no pews, no chairs, no altar – nothing. A memorial plaque to one of the founders still hung on the wall however, proclaiming that he and his wife, “relict of the above,” had contributed to its building.

The town was shuttered and silent. Planks were nailed across padlocked doors. No fishing boats were moored in the harbor or tied up at the wharves. Ripped and torn plastic on the greenhouses exposed the weeds within. Not a living thing was to be seen. Even the gulls had left, as
there were no fishermen, and no fish. “Dew Drop In” with a cartooned drunken face on a roughly painted sign on the door to a shack indicated the former local bar.

This incredibly beautiful outport had seen its last days and been shuttered by the government. The ferry no longer ran, and electricity was cut off. It became a dead end, with no road in or out. When the fish left, the people had to follow, many of them sadly relocating to the oil shale fields of Alberta for jobs that paid. The only living things we saw in the village next day were a few caribou wandering amongst abandoned houses.
Wednesday

Whiskey, gin and pints.  
I followed you out the door  
The smell of evergreens and salt  
Boats in the distance  
Islands  
Illuminated waters, low tide and restless waves.  
Reverberating sounds of the night,  
A night in Maine.  
Pounding hearts  
Comforting silence, resonate.  
Your presence lead me to a dangerous vicinity and laid me down.  
Inhibitions gone  
Simultaneously within and without  
Inside.  
Deep breaths, sore knees and stabbing pine needles  
You kept me close.  
The rain kissed our skin, your lips kissed mine  
Eyes closed, spontaneous sounds and explicit movement  
I gave way and the position shifted  
We redirected ourselves  
Concurrent.  
The rain fell even harder, as if it was falling for us, ceaseless.  
Covering our bodies.  
Soul wrenching and somehow uninterrupted.  
Participating relentlessly in the moonlight.  
I laughed.  
Maine, tonight I'll be staying here with you.

Ashley Shultz  
Isle au Haut
Starr Cummin Bright
Islesford
Frederick Appell
Great Cranberry Island
Celebrating 70

In early August, we celebrated my 70th birthday with family, lobsters and champagne at our cottage on Cliff Island in Casco Bay.

One sparkling sunny day, I ventured off alone to the fire road with my plastic bag in search of blackberries. The sun was hot and the fire road is dry gravel, high up on the island and exposed to the elements.

The berries were plentiful but the picking is laborious and prickery. I was sticking to the perimeter with my short sleeves and pants.

After 45 minutes, I was hot, SO hot. Sweat dripped from my forehead, shirt stuck to my back, mouth dry as tinder. I already had a good bag of fruit but was lured back into the brambles by a lush branch of fat, ripe, glistening berries.

ATTACKED BY BERRY BUSHES!

It was the furthest I had broken into the brush, and thorns tore at my skin and clothes. When I escaped, blood was coursing down my legs from deep scratches on both knees. Socks awash in sticky blood, a lone Kleenex was available to staunch the flow. Now I was covered in both sweat AND blood.

Somewhere nearby was a path down to the water. At first, it seemed I had missed it, but suddenly it appeared, and I lurched down the rocky trail, searching for relief. Dropping the berry bag into a shady spot and perching my shoes and socks on a wayward log, I hobbled across the stony beach to the freezing water of the Maine coast.

Rinsing the blood and sweat away from my calves and knees lured me further in...up to the top of my thighs. The water was icy cold and clear and invigorating. Not enough.

Off came my shorts. Into the water up to my waist. Not enough.
Up to my bra. Not enough.
Then over my shirt and up to my hearing aided ears.
Enough!
I was elated! My 70 year old body vibrated with
cleanliness and clarity and well-being. It was all enough.

Molly Morell
Cliff Island

John DeWitt
Isle au Haut
Is The Mail Here Yet?

“Breakfast is ready!”
Mom calls to my brothers Harry, Frank and me. We hustle downstairs to our kitchen. It is summer vacation in 1959. I am ten years old.

Baby Jeff sits in his highchair while Mom feeds him his baby cereal. It looks a lot like the homemade glue we make for projects out of flour and water. The small jar of applesauce that sits on the highchair tray looks better. I hope he eats all of the applesauce.

On our rickety round kitchen table, Mom has set up the items for our breakfast. There are three pea green Melmac cereal bowls, three spoons, the sugar bowl, a glass jug of milk, and two bananas cut in half.

The cereal boxes sit in the middle of the table. Today the choices are Cheerios, Corn Flakes, and Rice Krispies. No sugared cereals are allowed like Cocoa Krispies or Sugar Pops. I think that allowing us to add our own sugar might be just as bad as the banned boxes of cereal.

Oh well, I reach for the Cheerios. After I fill my bowl with all the ingredients I choose, I begin to read the box. First the front of the box.

“Comic books for 10 cents.”

Harry and Frank chatter about playing baseball with their friends. I play, too, but do not talk much while I am reading about the mail order offer. I want to send away for the comics and get my own mail sent back to me!

“Walt Disney Comic Books. All New Stories. 32 pages each. Pluto, Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse or other sets.”

There is a lot to decide.

My cereal is getting soggy and begins to look a lot like baby Jeff’s glue cereal. I can’t finish the soggy mess.
Ten cents plus two cereal box tops. The mailing address and the rest of the order information is on the back of the box. I have ten cents, I think. Now I need to wait ‘til the cereal box is empty, cut out the order form and save two General Mills box tops. It takes weeks to get it all together. Mom helps me with getting it all secured in a large white envelope. Luckily, she has the right amount of stamps to mail it. I run to put the envelope in the mailbox. Every day, I ask Mom. “Is the mail here yet?” “Yes,” she answers. I run to the mailbox. Nothing for me. “Oh phooey,” I mutter.

Soon I write a question to submit to the Ask Andy column in the *Portland Evening Press Herald*. It shouldn’t be that hard to have my question chosen. The questions are like mine. Why is the sky blue? Do ants bite? Why do cats purr? No luck at all with Ask Andy. I must have written him at least twenty-one questions and still no mail!

Finally in late summer, the comic books arrive in a large brown envelope that barely fits in our mailbox. I tear open the envelope. The comic books are here!! I read them over and over. I love them. Sometimes I let one of my brothers who can read look at them. Over time, I hold baby Jeff and read him the adventures of Mickey Mouse, which seems to be his favorite.

The summer is almost over. No more leisurely breakfasts except on the weekends or vacations. The search for mail order stuff goes on.

Allyson Smith
Chebeague Island
A Bad Day on Casco Bay

A fear of dying does have the propensity of forcing a person to reconsider earlier decisions.

Walking down the ramp to the floating dock at DiMillo's, Chris began to question the wisdom of this trip. Sure, he had been out with Ethan on other boats, even on the boat he was about to board, and the old man had shown him a few 'tricks of the trade' as they related to boat handling, but still... The day had started so well. For the first time, Ethan had sent him out to bring a boat back to the yard by himself. Studying for a BA in American Lit at Bowdoin College had not provided quite the proper training, one might say, for scraping barnacles off boat bottoms, or navigating even a small boat 25 miles across Casco Bay, but three months working alongside more experienced hands had given him some new knowledge.

Walking along the dock to the slip where the boat lay, Chris swung between elation and anxiety.

“Finally, the old man trusts me to take a boat out by myself – Oh God, I hope I don't mess up anything! What a great day to be on the water –

What if I hit a rock or the fog comes in – Naw, no fog called for today, I've got the chart, I've done the trip with Ethan – What if I run out of fuel? ”

It was only a 25 foot runabout. a summer boat owned by one of those “people from away’ as the seasonal residents were called by the locals. She was a 'nice' craft, from a local boatbuilder using a lobster boat hull but with a varnished mahogany and teak deck that would never be found on a work boat. The hull was designed for the choppy waters of the Maine coast, so she handled well even under Chris's relatively inexperienced guidance when he pulled away from DiMillo's Marina in downtown Portland. He had checked off all the items on his mental safety check list and called Ethan before he cast off.
A crystalline blue sky formed a dome over the earth below, making one of those special Maine autumn days. The air was cool but his fleece jacket was enough to keep him comfortable. After passing old Fort Gorges, he entered the passage between Great Diamond and Peaks Islands. The maples and oaks with scattered birch had reached their peak of autumnal flamboyance with such reds and yellows and oranges they appeared to be aflame in the brilliant light. In a few weeks, the leaves would be gone and one would be able to see the summer cottages that were hidden from view during the summer months but for now, there were only occasional glimpses of habitation.

Ocean swells rolling in from the southeast tossed the boat around when he crossed the passage between Peaks and Long Islands. Once in the lee of Long Island the course was north to the tricky pass between Long Island and Great Chebeague. It had been going so well until he wrapped that lobster pot line around the propeller. Then while he was leaning over the side of the boat, using the boat hook in an attempt to untangle the line, an extra-large swell unbalanced him and he was suddenly under water – in very cold water.

“It's cold! Can I make it to Harpswell over there? Man oh man, why did I have to go right down the middle of the sound?”

Before he could recover his wits, the tide had swept him away from the boat. Into his mind, came a passage from a Stephen Crane short story, *The Open Boat*

“If I am going to be drowned – if I am going to be drowned – if I'm going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?”

*I could die here and I'm remembering a passage from a story I read two years ago? Swim boy, swim – you don't make it ashore shortly, nobody will know or care about your knowledge of 19th Century American authors.*
Chris felt the loss of feeling creeping up his legs as he swam toward the island. His fingers were becoming numb. The off-lying rocks at the southernmost point were too steep to climb and he was beginning to despair when a swirl in the current thrust him around the barnacle and seaweed clad boulders to bring in sight a beach of water-polished small stones.

The crawl across the beach, out of the reach of the tide, sapped the last of his energy. Chris rolled onto his back and looking up saw that he lay in front of a sign:

Shelter Island
No Trespassing

Roman Folk
Chebeague

Gary Hoyle
Swan’s Island
Nighttime Before the Sea Levels Rise

If you lean in to look
    the ocean at night is indigo
        filled with ten thousand phosphorous stars.

Phosphorous stars and a silent moon
    illumine the shore from which we watch
        two tall ships sailing home.

Two sailing ships oblivious
    to watchers on the shore.
    Three island huts swaying on stilts,

    a mirror image of quivering trees
        and heron’s feet,
        their melody quiet blue.

Quiet are the eyes
    peering through night: a bat, an owl,
        three islands swept in lunar light.

In lunar light, the islands rise
    like pyramids or humpback whales,
        darkness their silhouette.

Their silhouette, their secrets kept,
    their silent eyes are watching us
    to see what we will do.

Alexander Levering Kern
    Chebeague Island
Catalog

Home. The complications and the quarrels, the curves of muscle, textures of your skin, the trudge uphill, divisions of our labor, t-shirts full of holes, contagious grin, engine maintenance, boat plans, hauling lobsters, the stink of chemicals, sawdust, fasteners, paint, ladders in the peach trees, building fences, triage in the henhouse, no restraint in welcome or in action, no allowance for failure, or forgiveness for the breach of promise, readiness always to move forward, the lovely southern cadence of your speech, our bedroom facing east towards the sunrise the generous stairwell, the wide front door the long view framed by sweeping windows, the radiance of the smooth Ashwood floor gravel and sand, pick and shovel, backhoe, splitter, rifle, every kind of saw, lumber, wheelbarrow parked beside the woodpile, bowline, clinch knot, clove hitch, monkey’s paw, always the light brimming on the ocean, moonlight, sunlight, twilight, foglight, dawn, wind and rain lashing at the windows, pools of water shining in the lawn, vegetable gardens, stony driveway, milkweed, fences, compost, blueberries, chicken yard, deer and seals, eider ducks and eagles, doors unlocked, keys left in the cars river dreams, psychedelics, dog love, tides and currents, summer solstice light, hot water made from the sun and the woodstove, processional of stars on moonless nights, the sounds of tide and wind hushing and howling, the garden tumbling seaward, full of flowers, working summer days into the darkness,
the circling shores of the island that was ours,
fathoming the heart, reading the river,
confusion of rapids and the standing wave,
what I have kept, what I have relinquished,
what disappears, what I can try to save.

Kathie Fiveash
Isle au Haut

Sandy Lilley
North Haven
Timmy and The Old Man

It was a brisk December morning. The air crisp and clean with a hint of wood smoke tingling the nose. It’s cold. Barely any warmth left in the rising sun.

Old Timmy wasn’t on the porch. “Must be sleeping in,” I said to my dog, Quincy.

Timmy, a long haired Golden Retriever, had been coming to the island for sixteen years.

The old man, Timmy’s master, was moving around in his house.

“Hmmmm,” I thought, “he’s up early.” Timmy’s dog bed was on the porch. I wondered if he’d made it through another night.

They usually came in the summer. It was late in the season for summer walks. Those ended when Timmy’s back legs didn’t work anymore. He would rest on his dog bed, watching the day go by, bundled up against the cold, his doggie wheelchair close by. The porch had a sheet of plywood nailed to the rails. A barrier to the North wind. A wind that would penetrate through every layer of clothing, seeping deep into your bones where only the heat from a wood stove can thaw you out.

A chair laid on its side several feet away from where it usually sat, tipped over from the previous night’s wind. “No guitar playing today,” I said aloud to Quincy. He looks at me, head cocked to one side, more interested in the next smell. Old Timmy enjoyed the old man’s guitar playing.

He’d lift his head and wag his tail while the birds would harmonize. Today, just a flock of crows feasting on the remaining browned apples, startled by my approach.

No snow yet. The ground has hardened. Our feet crunching the frozen dirt and our breath coming out like sea smoke. “What do you think?” I ask Quincy, “long walk or short?” He does a little hop, energized by the cold air. “Long walk it is.”
We continue on our way, my mind wandering to old Timmy and his master, while Quincy concentrated on marking odors emitted from our previous day’s walk. I’d recently found out from a friend, while I was walking and they were driving and stopped to chat that the old man brought Timmy back to the island for his final days. Timmy’s happy place. A place he’d come every summer, the joy on his face palpable while his head hung out the rolled down window, the ocean breeze saturating his nostrils on the ferry ride to his island.

I continued to reflect on Timmy’s life.

Remembering back to the days before I had Quincy, when I walked this way alone, meeting up with a younger Timmy, running in the field across the street. “Good morning!” I would yell to the old man who’d be out in the field with Timmy. He’d wave back, smiling. Timmy would leap in the air, joyful in the pursuit of a grasshopper, pouncing on the unwary mouse. He’d notice me, then bound to where I stood, bringing his ball, wet and dirty and drop it at my feet. Hoping for a game of fetch or a scratch behind his ear.

Quincy and I get to our destination where we liked to sit and look out on Frenchman’s Bay. My face raised to the morning sun, internalizing my gratitude for another beautiful day and a walk with my dog.

I was still thinking about Timmy and the days he used to swim and dance in the waves below me, chasing driftwood as it moved in the tide. He hasn’t been able to do that for a while, his back legs needing support. Legs that took him on many adventures.

The highlight of his day now is when someone walks by where he lays on the front porch. He lets out the occasional “Woof-woof,” wagging his tail, hoping to be acknowledged. When I’d walk by, Quincy would pull me towards Timmy so they could touch noses.

“Ready to head back?” I say aloud to Quincy.
He lets out a soft “Aaarf,” letting me know he’s ready for whatever I’m doing. I stand up, brush the dried grass off. Quincy excited to be moving onto new smells stands up and tugs a little on his leash as he spies a squirrel.

We walk through the field. The field where Timmy used to play. The tall grass brown and bent over, still sparkling from the previous night’s frost in the morning sun. I take the leash off Quincy so he can run. He finds a stick and drops it at my feet. I pick it up and throw it. Quincy finds it and brings it back as we move closer to the edge of the field. Back the way we’d come, closer to the old man’s house.

There’s a lump on the front porch. “Is it Timmy?” I say aloud, sending out a silent prayer to the doggie God.

I look ahead and see wood smoke from the old man’s house, rising gently, higher and higher in the sky until it disappears. The wood pile dwindling.

Laurel Lemoine
Swan’s Island
Philippe Berthoud
Swan’s Island

Allyson Smith
Chebeague
David Sears
Matiniccus
Numbers of Migrating Monarchs on Monhegan Offer Hope

During an extended stay on Monhegan last September for the fall bird migration, I experienced a migration that made my heart soar. In the 22 years I have visited the island during migration, I have never seen anything like what I experienced then. And I’m not talking about the birds, I’m talking about butterflies. Thousands of them. Everywhere.

Among the island’s residents and visitors, the sheer number of monarch butterflies flying around us became a shared parlance. We bonded over butterflies. Healthy patches of goldenrod and aster laden with dozens of feeding butterflies became common stops for shared admiration and conversation along the hiking trails and in town.

One particular spot in the heart of the village consistently hosted hundreds of monarchs feeding and flitting in the air above a large patch of seven-foot high goldenrod that swayed in the sea breeze. The effect could only be described as “magical” by those observing below. As one person noted with awe, she could hear their wings as they flew around her. Several people mentioned feeling as if they were in a Disney moment, surrounded by flapping butterflies just like young Bambi in the classic animated film.

As I roamed around at sun-up each morning, hoping to spot arriving migrant songbirds, I also began to notice Monarch butterfly roosts high in some of the spruces and pines. Insects cannot regulate their own body heat, so they basically can’t move when their bodies are too cold. Migrating Monarchs will often cluster together in nocturnal roosts high in trees, especially if the nights are cold. I had only come upon a small roost of Monarchs once before, years earlier, so I marveled to find multiple roosts now, with hundreds of butterflies in each.
The conifers’ needles, as well as the tight clusters of butterfly bodies themselves, help shelter the insects from the overnight chill. The spruce and pine trees around the brewery seemed to be a preferred roosting area, as well as another spruce grove in Lobster Cove. I heard from some brewery visitors that they had watched butterflies joining the roosts early the previous evening, around the time of last call.

To find a Monarch roost first thing in the morning is a bit like finally seeing one of those 3-D hidden pictures. The butterflies fold their wings up flat so that the duller colored undersides are all that’s visible. In low light, these underwings blend in remarkably well with dead needles and cones on the spruce boughs. It’s only when sunlight begins to strike the roost and warm up the butterflies that you really start to notice: one or two Monarchs begin to open their wings, flapping the bright orange topsides like semaphores, and suddenly you see them… and dozens more still closed up tight all around.

As the morning progresses, one by one the butterflies leave the roost, at first just out and back, or to a different perch. Eventually, they’ve all dispersed to refuel on nectar among the flower gardens and scattered patches of wildflowers around the island. Perhaps today will be the day they will head out over the ocean and fly a little farther south, en route to Mexico.

While on the island I had the good fortune to be able to participate in a large-scale citizen science project of the organization Monarch Watch by helping my friend Bryan Pfeiffer tag Monarchs. As the Monarch Watch website explains: “Tagging was originally used…[to] help locate overwintering Monarchs and later to determine where Monarchs came from that wintered in Mexico. [The] long-range tagging program at Monarch Watch continues to reveal much more…about the origins of monarchs that reach Mexico, the timing and pace of the migration,
mortality during the migration, and changes in geographic distribution.”

Bryan, who has tagged butterflies for nearly 20 years, showed up on the island with 300 Monarch Watch butterfly tags and an extra net. With his experience, he was able to sweep up six butterflies at a time in his net before stopping to tag them. I managed to catch one about every dozen tries, but eventually got the hang of it. There were so many butterflies clustered on trailside flowers that it was almost impossible not to catch one. In fact, some were so involved in feeding that you could easily catch them with your bare hands.

Once I finally caught one, I would reach into the net, gently press all four of the butterfly’s wing parts closed around its thorax with my thumb and forefinger, and carefully pull it out flat. The tags are tiny round white stickers containing three lines of text: “MWTag.org / Monarch Watch /[a unique number]. These stickers are backed with a strong adhesive that sticks easily to the butterfly’s wing when pressed lightly.

Each tag was stuck to the discal cell—an orange area roughly the shape of a mitten—on the monarch’s hind underwing. These tags are very light, and do not interfere with the butterfly’s flight in any way. Usually the tagged insect would fly off immediately and vigorously upon release. This southward migrating generation of monarchs is, relatively speaking, bigger and stronger than prior generations; wings built to potentially fly two-thousand miles or more can handle a tiny tag.

The spreadsheet of information that Bryan submitted to Monarch Watch included the sex, tagging location, and date linked to each tag number. If one of our tagged butterflies were to be recovered, the finder could then log into MWTag.org and find out where it came from. Monarch Watch reports that most of its recovered tags are found at overwintering sites in central Mexico. The organization pays local guides and farmers the equivalent
of five US dollars for each tagged butterfly they find among the masses of (mostly untagged) butterflies.

The odds are very slim that one of the butterflies we tagged on Monhegan will be recovered. Over the years, Bryan has been notified about the recovery in Mexico of only four out of the thousands of butterflies he’s tagged, and those four had all originated in Vermont.

Monarchs have the ability to fly up to 100 miles a day. So after my return to the mainland at month’s end, I imagined all the butterflies we tagged, out there winging their way south. A NOAA posting in early October showed a cloud of butterflies and dragonflies migrating over Oklahoma that was so big it registered on weather radar. I like to think some of “our” butterflies were in that cloud, almost home.

It turns out that the butterfly bonanza on the island was representative of the overall migration in the eastern United States in 2019. Thanks primarily, it seems, to luck with the weather, reports of healthy numbers of migrating monarchs were widespread and shared with much excitement.

By Trap Day (October 1), most of the Monarchs massed on Monhegan had dispersed, migrating southward ahead of killing frosts. I had taken dozens of photos in an inadequate, even desperate, attempt to capture the experience, to preserve it. Knowing what our insect populations are up against these days, I hold only a small hope that I will ever enjoy a butterfly migration like that again in my lifetime. It was, after all, just a few years ago that I saw only two Monarchs out on Monhegan in September. But a small hope is still hope, and I’ll hold onto that hope as if it were a butterfly.

Kristen Lindquist
Monhegan
Jessica Sanborn
Great Cranberry Island

Laurie Farley
Swan’s Island
Island Snap

Pale wings curving against a bright blue sky
wind playing arpeggios in the tall marsh grass
diamond glitters on indigo water
the sun-gold head of a child
and the silver one of a grandmother
bent over the sand
picking with choreographed fingers
tumbled emerald, sapphire and crystalline glass
reincarnated from some
long forgotten celebration or dredged
from skeleton vessels no longer buoyed
by commerce or hope
stirring
like a sea of stars
In a black and silent night

Barbara Caldwell-Pease
Islesford

Paul Averill Liebow
Great Cranberry Island
The Peonies

I have wanted to live
as they do, when, in July,
after being tucked up tight,
they fling themselves
gangbusters wide, all
their many petals
peeled to expose centermost gold,
the under ones dropping down
to receive the breeze
letting it make them tremble.
To be borne up by v’s of green,
leaves cheering them full open,
day torches, blood-dark
burning with time.
To, momentarily at least,
brighten the faces of passersby
who might be shouldering
unimaginable cumber,
to strike distress with magenta fire.

Sam King
Great Cranberry Island
Beverly McAloon
Swan’s Island
Lifeflight

I instantly wake up.  
It sounds like a lawn mower at first but I know what it is. 
I am worried.  
I look at the clock  
11:30 feels like the middle of the night to me now.  
It's getting louder as the seconds pass.  
I can hear them circling.  
Please let it be a test run  
I can see the lights in my window  
This is not a test  
I pray  
The engine gets louder  
I know they are right on top of me.  
I keep praying  
They start to slow  
It comes to a stop  
I know in half an hour they will take off again  
I could set my clock by it  
I keep praying  
I still know nothing  
Half an hour goes by quickly when you worry  
When you want time to reverse  
When everything was ok.  
They start up again  
Preparing to leave  
I jump  
Just like the first time  
Life flight has come and gone  
Leaving myself and countless others to worry  
Some of us know the who and what to pray about  
The rest wait to hear the news  
From the family or friends  
To see how we can help  
That's what we do  
A small community comes together
When we know others are hurting
It's a risk to live here
We have no hospital
We are surrounded by water
The only way off the island is by boat or flight
Those that live here find the risk is worth it
We have an ambulance
We have a fire department
We have amazing volunteers
We need the space, the fresh air and the freedom
We need the safety of not having to lock up
This is island life
I wouldn't want it any other way

Jennifer Lemoine Turner
Swan’s Island

Cindy Thomas
Islesford
Jack Merrill
Islesford

Isabella Messer
Matinicus
Summer Thunder

There is thunder somewhere near
Rumbling on the horizon beyond the fog bank
Lingering on the edge of my mind
Remembering childhood summer storms
Hammock rocking, back and forth, back and forth
On the porch with family
Secure and safe.

Back and forth, back and forth, rocks the bell buoy
Ding dong, ding dong, its constant chant
Propelled by shifting tides, always clanging
Gulls fly low over the water
Searching for a meal
All seems still, but
Surf roars against the Eastern Shore
Seals bark from distant rocks
Small birds chatter, flitting about in nearby firs
Rain - drops on leaves and branches
Crows caw, messaging back and forth
Crackle of tires on dirt road below the house
Wings of hummingbirds flutter fast, whirring as they swoop in to feed on nectar
Thunder rumbling, getting closer.

Ann Marie Maguire
Swan’s Island
Lily Ellison
Swan’s Island
Daniel DeBord
Monhegan
The Hunter’s Eye

There he stood protecting his doe,
Watching the man walk with a bow.
Tracking the deer prints in the mud,
The hunter thought the day was a dud.

While taking a rest on an old tree stump,
He was shocked when he heard a thump.
The hunter looked up and down for the deer,
The buck stood still as if frozen with fear.

“Today will be the day,” the man said out loud,
Through the woods came a crashing crowd.
Everyone wanted that big twelve point buck,
Hopefully the man was the one with good luck.

There he stood protecting his doe,
Watching all of the hunters walk silent and slow.
Staying hidden behind an old spruce tree,
Waiting for all of the men to flee.

Timothy and his son claimed their lookout spot,
They sat hoping that they would get the perfect shot.
The woods were very quiet, the wind blowing,
“The deer’s mine,” Timothy said and the hunters get going.

There he stood protecting his doe,
Listening to the hunter’s voices grow.
With nobody wanting to leave the hunting ground,
The buck had to figure his way around.

Step by step, trying not to make noise,
Down the road comes a truck full of boys.
Wearing camo pants and a bright orange vest,
Everyone hoping for a straight shot at the chest.
Hunters sitting still, hoping for movement,
One of the young boys sneezed, causing amusement.
Time has passed and the sun had gone down,
One by one the men headed back into town.

There he stood protecting his doe,
Watching all of the hunters as they go.
A few of the hunters stayed, hoping to get their chance,
All they really wanted was one little glance.

Lots of time passed and the hunters got bored,
They packed up their gear and took off in their Ford.
The one man decided to stay a bit longer,
Hoping the wind didn’t get much stronger.

Leaves started to rustle, making it harder to hear,
Then came a crunch from behind his right ear.
Not wanting to make a sudden movement,
He had to turn slowly for angle improvement.

There he stood protecting his doe,
He made quick eye contact with his foe.
The hunter took his stance and slowly drew back his bow,
Then out of nowhere came a little doe.

The man stood still and confused, not knowing what to do,
He really just wanted a hot bowl of deer stew.
He knew shooting one wouldn’t be right,
The man told the deer to have a good night.

There he stood protecting his doe
Gazing at the man walk away with his bow.
“I’ll get that buck next year,” the man had said,
He walked back home and was ready for bed.

Kaylee Ames
North Haven
Summer

We are in the lake. It doesn’t have a color. Our heads appear as if not attached to bodies. Trees crowd the shore, maples shimmering silver in the wind

while cedar trunks roll down the rocks before they rise—like elephant trunks thick and wrinkled extending down toward the water then up, up, reaching

supple yet strong, flowing yet firm, majestic as Mayan sculptures, monumental in shape and size, curves contrasting with straight maples

while above, crystalline blue proclaims lucidity, made more blue by puffs of white, cotton ball white, with blue that goes and goes, singing

as it goes, lifting us from the lake even as we stay, weightless— and the image stays and stays— carried through fall and winter,

it stays.

Colleen Filler
Isle au Haut
Maine Island Writers & Artists

You are invited to contribute your work to

*The Island Reader*
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Sustaining Islands Issue

Submission deadline:
DECEMBER 31, 2020

For complete details visit www.islandreader.com
About Maine Seacoast Mission

Founded in 1905 Maine Seacoast Mission serves DownEast, coastal towns, and outer islands by investing in communities, families, children, education, and the future of our hardworking state. The Mission provides critical necessities like food, medical treatment, warm clothing, emergency heating assistance, and essential home repairs. In addition to pastoral support the Mission hosts educational and social opportunities.

The Mission provides many services to Maine’s islands via the 74-foot, steel-hulled MV Sunbeam V, which is equipped with state-of-the-art telemedicine technology and ice breaking capabilities. The Mission is headquartered on Mount Desert Island and delivers land-based services from its 60-acre, DownEast Campus in Cherryfield, Washington, County.

To learn more, visit www.seacoastmission.org.