Words of the Waves: A Nautical Collection

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The coast of Maine is a special place to spend one’s childhood. Years spend among a tight-knit family and community of sailors, fishermen and “boat people” of all kinds fostered in me a love for the sea that defines who I am today. Photos of me as a toddler on my grandparent’s 38-foot sailboat wearing a lifejacket with a leash lashed to it signify, to me, the beginning of a lifelong passion and obsession with the sea, coastal life and people, and with sailing.

Sailing camp at the Harraseeket Yacht Club began at age seven. I spent all summer, every summer, exploring the nooks and crannies of Casco Bay with people who today are some of my closest and dearest friends. Once old and salty enough, I went on to teach at HYC, trying to inspire that same sense of exploration and discovery in my young sailors. Those many years practicing, teaching and racing in small sailboats lead to a high school semester abroad spent on the schooner Harvey Gamage, a training vessel operated by the non-profit Ocean Classroom Foundation. This truly life changing experience, and my first time sailing offshore, taught me unforgettable lessons about the role and place of my beloved hobby in the history of our world. More lifelong friendships formed as our small student crew spent months visiting new places in the Caribbean and the eastern seaboard, encountering the worst weather we had seen in our young careers on the water, and learning the ins and outs of old Harvey Gamage.

Then, after a tumultuous freshman year at Skidmore College, I decided to take some time off from school. I went back to the sea, this time as a professional sailor aboard the historic Gloucester fishing schooner Roseway. Owned and operated by a non-profit educational organization called World Ocean School, I spent two years with Roseway, serving as a deckhand, educator, and eventually as the first mate. She took me from the Virgin Islands to the Great Lakes and back again, and
was a place to hone and expand my skills as a sailor, my relationship with the sea, and new friendships with new crewmates.

Thousands of nautical miles later, I am here. Journals, photographs and friendships serve to document my travels and experiences, as do the many books that I've collected and acquired along the way. Simply put, my collection is here as a result of a deep desire to keep the sea and sailing a part of my life, particularly during those times when I can’t be on or near the water. This collection also serves as a way to connect my passion for the sea and her ships with my other interests, such as art, photography, marine biology, history, and the stars.

Many of the books in my collection were gifts from family members and friends who shared and supported my interest. Others are reference books or novels purchased for classes on nautical topics, including those I took while aboard Harvey Gamage or helped to teach on Roseway. The rest are items I purchased here and there for myself, and many came into my hands as a result of the perpetual book swap that took place amongst the Roseway crew while I was onboard. My mother, Cynthia, who is a Mainer, artist, and sailor herself, also deserves mention here as an important supporter of my interest in sailing. She is responsible for contributing many of the more special parts of my collection, such as the beautiful children’s books and photographic anthologies. Through this collection as a whole, I can chart the evolution of my interest in sailing and the sea through the books that have come to find a place on my shelf.

In reflecting on why my collection came about, I was struck by how many of the books I remember actually reading while on the sea, whether in between watches during offshore transits, or on a quiet night at anchor. This reminded me of the historic relationship between sailors and words, whether in the form of novels, poems, or sea shanties. Stories were the best way to kill long hours of boredom at sea when the wind was down, or to relax after a long day of grueling work and weather. To be a part of this tradition makes me immensely happy, and I think my collection demonstrates this. Collecting these books has not only allowed me to continue to learn and become a more skilled sailor, but also to maintain a connection with the part of me that exists on the sea, when I can’t be there in person. These works are a
reflection of a lifelong interest and love, no matter how salt-stained or sea-tossed they appear.

**Bibliography:**


*New England and the Sea* served as a textbook for a nautical history class that was a part of the Ocean Classroom curriculum when I was aboard *Harvey Gamage*. We read most of this book, which very comprehensively recounts the history of New England’s relationship with sea with the help of historic images.


A classic and fixture in maritime literature, *Heart of Darkness* was part of our nautical English class aboard *Harvey Gamage*. One of the classic authors of maritime literature, Conrad made a lasting impression on me as a young person experiencing the world of offshore sailing for the first time.


*The Wanderer* is a book I read as a young adult that will always stick with me, and will always have a place on my shelf. This tale of a ragtag group of family members is told through journal entries of two teen-aged cousins, Sophie and Cody, as they sail *Wanderer* across the Atlantic to Ireland, the land of their grandfather, Bompie. It is a
tale of the young characters discovery both of their place on the boat and in the crew as it is of their place in the world and their family. *The Wanderer* was a gift from my grandparents, who completed their own transatlantic voyage in the 1980’s.


This beautiful little book was a gift from my mother, from one of the years I was on *Roseway*. I had just finished a course to become a certified scuba diver, and this guidebook was a gift that helped feed a newfound interest in the underwater world I was starting to explore. This book documents over 600 species of sea critters, and each description is accompanied by really lovely and classic illustrations, many from the documents of historic naturalists. This book will always travel with me when going to the shore or sea.


Based on a traditional Dutch lullaby, Field’s poem coupled with Johnson’s illustrations in *Wynken, Blynken, & Nod* creates a beautiful and simple children’s fantasy. Three boys set out to sea in a wooden shoe with a sail, to fish for herring with their nets of silver and gold, while the man-in-the-moon sings and watches over the three. Sea creatures and stars dance around each page, and bring us back to the bedroom where the three boys sleep and dream. I’m not sure which family member this book belonged to first, but it is the oldest in my collection, and one of my favorites.

Of all the boats I’ve had the fortune to sail, work, and live aboard, the schooners have been my favorite. They are classic, beautiful, and fast boats, and their history is interesting and deeply rooted in the coast of my native New England. The town of Gloucester, Massachusetts, is famous for the construction and operation of the largest fleet of schooners, originally built for fishing, in the nation. This book and its fabulous historic photographs thoroughly documents the history of their construction, fishing, and racing on the coasts of New England and Nova Scotia. *Roseway* is an original Gloucester fishing schooner, one of only six that is still floating today after the construction of thousands during the late 19th and early 20th century. I first read this book on *Roseway,* and bought a copy after my time aboard her, as a reminder of the amazing part of our history that I got to help sail and maintain.


Based on true history of the infamous “lobster wars” that took place on the Maine coast, *Stern Men* is a well-researched and entertaining work of historical fiction that I love. Gilbert captures the personalities and life styles of Maine’s most rugged fishermen, and the territorial hostilities and “warfare” that arose around the more remote islands and bits of the coast. While Gilbert does a wonderful job in illustrating this part of my home state’s maritime history and capturing the attitude and feel of those more extreme parts of Maine.

Linda Greenlaw is a familiar name in the Maine fishing community. A well-known and respected writer and fisherwoman, Greenlaw serves as something of a role model to any female embarking on those sea-going ventures that are traditionally male-dominated. I read this book right after being promoted to mate on the *Roseway*. Her musings on crew-captain relationships and the funny characters one inevitably runs into in working on fishing boats is very entertaining. As a fellow Mainer and female member of the sea-faring industry, her words provided some important lessons about respect, both for the sea and a ship’s crew.


Hemingway’s tale of an old Cuban fisherman is a favorite of mine, and one I think a simple and lovely portrayal of the sea and man’s relationship with it. I read this book in high school, and of all the books I read during those years, this is one of the few that I held on to and re-read afterwards. With my own family roots in Cuba and experiences at sea in smaller boats, this tale strikes somewhat of a personal chord with me. I also see in it an interesting, somewhat personal glimpse at one of my favorite authors, as *The Old Man and the Sea* is very different from Hemingway’s other stories and novels.


This wonderful collection of photographs by Norman Fortier is large and well documented. Working in the mid 20th century, Fortier captures not only the sailing traditions of the southern coast of New England at the time, but practically all other aspects of life on the
working waterfront as well. Organized by the towns and harbors in which the photographs were taken, this book vividly captures scenes of yacht racing, of fishing and dragging boats at work, and the impact that Mother Nature can have on a part of the world so heavily reliant upon boats and the waterfront. Photography is a hobby of mine, and the striking way in which Fortier captures the seafaring community in my part of the world during this time period speaks strongly to me.


This epic true story of a nor'easter unlike any other, and the lives of the fishermen it claimed in the North Atlantic, is one I'll never forget. Junger’s account of the unprecedented weather phenomenon that created “the perfect storm” is enough to leave any seafaring soul feeling newly humbled by the power and unpredictability of the ocean. The storm also hit the island near Portland, Maine, that my parents and I lived on at the time, and the tragedies of the lives lost were felt strongly in our community. I was too young to remember the actual storm, but this book recreates it in eye opening detail. I have had this copy since high school.


I first read this classic nautical coming of age story while on *Harvey Gamage*. Harvey, the young son of a wealthy couple falls off a steamship and is picked up by a Grand Banks fishing schooner run by a captain who refuses to cut his fishing trip short to deliver Harvey back to Gloucester. Instead, he offers Harvey a job for the trip, which Harvey accepts for lack of another option. He learns from the crew and adjusts to the rough, uncomfortable life and grows into a strong young man in the process. I also helped lead a book group during a student trip on *Roseway* that read Kipling’s beloved tale. My first copy was
mostly ruined by water, and I replaced it fairly recently with this hardcover, illustrated copy.


Poetry has long been linked with sea, written by sailors to stave off boredom on long voyages and document their travels, or by people on land feeling and responding to the pull of the ocean. Organized into categories by type and/or theme of each work, this book contains many poetic masterpieces written about the sea, as well as many lesser-known works. Many of these works have appeared in classes I’ve taken about maritime literature and about entirely different subjects. A selection sea chanteys and work songs are also included, a tradition of particular interest to me. This book touches on the many facets of man’s interest and obsession with the sea through the ages. Among my favorite poems included are John Masefield’s *Sea Fever* and Samuel Coleridge’s *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*.


Robert McClosky was a renowned author and illustrator of children’s books who drew much inspiration from time spent on the coast of Maine during his life. I grew up with all of his stories, this one included. In this whimsical tale, retired deep-water fisherman Burt Dow sets out in his brightly painted double-ender, *Tidely Idely*, to go fishing. He catches a giant whale by the tail on accident. While bandaging the tip of the whales’ tail, he forgets to keep a weather eye out on the horizon. Knowing he wont make it home safely in the gale that’s headed his way, he strikes up a deal with the whale, and steers the *Tidely Idely* right down the whales throat. After repairing a leak in the boat, he paints the inside of the whale’s belly, causing the beast to burp and expel man and boat back out, right into the middle of a
whole pod of whales. Only after Burt Dow decks out each whale’s tale with a band-aid (they are jealous of the one he hooked) can he set off for home on the again calm sea. This was another cherished children’s book of mine, and will always be a part of my library.


I received McLaren’s book as a gift last year. *A Race for Real Sailors* is similar to *Down to the Sea* in that it documents the history of the Gloucester fishing schooner fleet in the late 19th and early 20th century. McLaren looks more specifically, however, at the Fisherman’s Cup race, an annual tradition that developed between fishing schooner captains of the Gloucester and the Nova Scotia fleets. Competed for in schooners built for speed and captained by the most experienced and rough-hewn of men, this race became a highly recognized event between American and Canadian fishermen. It is still held today, and I was lucky enough to compete as a part of the *Roseway* crew in 2008. McLaren compiles a really stunning collection of photographs to supplement his thorough narrative of the history of the Fisherman’s Cup and of the most famous schooners that competed. After years spent racing small sailboats, it was really exciting to compete on larger boats for the first time. McLaren captures all of the energy, thrill, and sheer power of the racing schooners, as well as their iconic role in our nation’s history.


This account of the life of female heroine Una includes her voyage on a whaling ship disguised as a cabin boy and marriage to Nantucket whale ship captain Ahab. It is exciting and successful in portraying both the shipboard environment of a whaling ship of the time, and the lives of those women who were involved in the industry through their
marriages to whaling captains. This is a part of my collection that was passed around between many of the *Roseway* crew, and was the subject of our own impromptu book club discussions over several evening meals.


This collection of 135 photos shot by Neal Parent on the coast of New England is breathtaking, and a truly beautiful representation of the working waterfront. Many photographs were shot in Maine, and feature schooners, yachts, harbor scenes, wildlife, and portraits of people. This book is particularly interesting to me as it includes a handful of photographs of *Roseway*, from several decades before I came to know and sail her. Every time I look at it I am reminded of my connection with the places, people, and traditions it portrays. It was a gift to my mother and I from my grandparents.


Philbrick’s account of the epic tale of the whale ship *Essex*, the inspiration for *Moby Dick*, is well written and a key part of any collection of books on the subject of maritime history. Philbrick tells the tale of the destruction of the *Essex* by an angry whale, and the 3,000-mile voyage made by the surviving crew in three long boats. Vivid detail is given in portraying the crew’s harrowing attempt to survive the South Pacific, the starvation and cannibalism that occurred in the long boats, and the ultimate rescue of the eight final survivors. This book tells an important story in the history of the American whaling industry, particularly that which operated out of Nantucket. Philbrick writes as if he himself was a member of the crew of the *Essex*. An interest in whales and the whaling industry led me to this book, and the high-seas excitement makes it all the more memorable.

This is a second incarnation of the story of the whale ship *Essex* that written by Philbrick. It differs from *In the Heart of the Sea* in that it is somewhat abridged and geared towards younger readers. It is another book I helped to lead in a book group for students on *Roseway*, and is just as wonderfully written as it’s adult counterpart. A little less cannibalism and somewhat simpler prose make this book a great true story for young sailors, and was very fun to help teach.


*The Shipping News* is the story of a man who relocates to the rugged coast of Newfoundland after a family trauma to try to reconnect with his roots. It is both entertaining and emotionally stirring, and stands out as one of my favorite reads from the past few years. The main character, Quoyle, gets a job with a local newspaper as the reporter of the shipping news of Killick-Claw harbor. Proulx examines the modernization of waterfront industries at the time through Quoyle’s interactions with local characters while reporting on shipping activities. In his efforts to learn more about his ancestors from the area (who have reputations as being pirates and thieves), landlubber Quoyle has his first terrifying experiences in the harbor in his small skiff. Proulx paints a striking image and unique story of a hard, isolated coastal town and it’s relationship with the rest of the world through the waterfront. The Newfoundland landscape in this novel isn’t much different from the coastal Maine landscape I know so well, and I think that is a big reason for why this book sticks with me today.

This fantastical young adult tale of two families of children and their sailing adventures in a couple of dinghies—*Swallow* and *Amazon*—is full of magic and discovery. I read this as a young girl and sailor, and remember the novel being an absolutely fabulous and exciting tale, and one which made me all the more inspired to spend as much time sailing around the islands of Maine as I could. It is the first in a series of similar stories of discovery, many of which I also read. I think this book was probably very important in encouraging my enthusiasm for discovery and adventure, particularly on the water.


There is nothing quite like the magnificence of the stars on a clear night, several hundred miles away from shore. I discovered this as a student on *Harvey Gamage*, and made an effort to learn to identify as many constellations and stars as I could during that trip. Rey’s book was onboard, and I fell in love with it, purchasing a copy of it for myself after that semester. It helped inspire a senior project a year later, and is a book that comes out often on clear summer nights. In addition to illustrations of the constellations, Rey also maps out parts of the sky and stars used by mariners in celestial navigation for centuries. Learning the stars and the stories behind the constellations is an old pastime of sailors, and one I enjoy myself. This book has been huge in helping with this endeavor.

This very thorough illustrated textbook covers just about every topic and skill set that a well-rounded sailor knows and practices, from the basics of navigation to anchoring vessels of all sizes. This book was another that our student crew used aboard *Harvey Gamage*, and one that I have referred to often since, both for my own sailing ventures and in my work in teaching sailing. This summer I will be designing my own curriculum for a seamanship class at Camden Yacht Club’s youth sailing program, and I anticipate using this book often in the planning and teaching of the class. It is handy and easy to use, and a valuable tool to me.


This is a recent addition to my collection, and one that I found at a used bookstore in Washington. Not only does it have illustrations and directions for tying a wide variety of knots and creating other useful things with rope, but it also includes a history of rope making and knot tying traditions. Other skills historically and currently employed by sailors involving rope and rigging are discussed and described thoroughly as well. While I still consider Hervey Garrett Smith’s *Marlinespike Sailor* to be a superior reference for all things involving rope and knots, it is always valuable to have a second description. I am looking forward to reading more of this book, and learning more of the history of rig and rope work.

Another part of our maritime literature class aboard *Harvey Gamage*, *The Tempest* was a fun read and source of entertainment during one of our longer ocean passages. We acted most of the play out, complete with costumes, and as a result this is by far the only work of Shakespeare’s that really stuck with me. The theme of the epic and utterly destructive storm at sea is timeless, and this play is a clear reminder of that.


Captain Slocum’s account of his famous voyage alone around the world is highly personal and eye opening, and a pivotal story in the genre of maritime history. A brilliant sailor, Slocum not only made it around the world alone in his 37-foot wooden sloop *SPRAY* and lived to tell the tale, but he meticulously documented his voyage, down to the primitive methods of navigation he used. His journal, as seen in *Sailing Alone Around the World*, is both an amazing tale of an intrepid and famous sailor, and a source of inspiration for those solo circumnavigators and offshore sailors who followed him. As a sailor who dreams herself of going around the world (though maybe not alone...) this story is inspiring as well as a source of important advice and information about the trip.


This book is a fixture in all shipboard and maritime libraries, and is one I love to read for pleasure and for practical purposes. Smith meticulously illustrates and gives step-by-step instructions for tying knots, doing splice work, fancy work, and other traditional arts
practiced by sailors for centuries. Smith is a wonderful writer and a mariner himself, and supplements his diagrams with historical information as well as with his own witty anecdotes. I personally specialized in rope, canvas, and rigging work while on *Roseway*, and many of the skills I have in this area were acquired with help from this book. It always goes sailing with me.


I first read *Longitude* while aboard *Harvey Gamage*. This historical account of British clockmaker John Harrison’s efforts to solve the problem of how to accurately establish longitude while at sea is well written. Before Harrison, no clock that could successfully keep time on a rocking and rolling ship had been made. Britain’s rapid growth as a naval power in the 18th century made the issue of accurate navigation more and more prominent, and after many failed attempts at keeping track of time and longitude, John Harrison’s fourth clock was finally tested and approved. In 2008 I studied abroad in London, and again read *Longitude* for a class. It was accompanied by a trip to Greenwich and the Royal Observatory, where Harrison’s four clocks are on display and working today. This book is thought-provoking not only in thinking about how accurate navigational methods came about, but in considering all the mariners who came before Harrison’s invention who went to sea anyway. Navigation is one of those skills I have learned much about during my time on boats, and this book is very important in understanding the development of the techniques used today and throughout history.

This anthology of articles written by a collection of notable sail makers, yacht racers, engineers, and yacht designers, is a highly detailed and specific reference source. It is organized into chapters by the different sails one finds on a yacht, and contains in depth descriptions of the physics involved in making a sail boat go, and how to maximize boat speed through the proper adjustment of each sail. This book was passed down to me from my grandparents after I developed an interest in racing. I was too young at the time to fully understand some of the concepts addressed, but it makes for an interesting reference source now that I have developed a broader understanding of the physics involved in sailing.


This is a magnificent book. Captain Alan Villiers, one of the most famous and experienced seamen of the 21st century has compiled, with help from “other adventures on the sea,” a concise and compelling history of man’s relationship with and history on the sea. Each chapter is well written and accompanied by many quality images and illustrations from contributing mariners and historians. Villiers writes not only from historical fact but also from personal experience throughout much of this book, and his first hand encounters with cultures and their sea-going vessels make his descriptions and tales all the more clear and riveting. *Men Ships and the Sea* is another book I began reading while on Roseway, as it was also a part of her ship’s library. I found my copy in an antique store last winter, and have come to value it very much as it is an increasingly hard book to come by. It is fascinating to read and look at.
Wish List:


As a female who has spent much time working in marine industries that are still predominantly male run and populated, this book is one I want to add to my collection just because I think it would be highly entertaining and inspiring to read about past women on the sea. The several leadership roles I've held on boats and on the water in the past have been challenging and rewarding, and I think I would really enjoy reading these stories.


Somehow, this classic of maritime literature has escaped my collection, and it doesn’t quite feel complete without it. *Moby Dick* closely relates to several items and themes in my collection, and I would love to finally obtain a copy.


A sailor himself, this is the tale of Jack London and his wife’s attempt to sail around the world. I haven’t read this book yet, but am a fan of London’s writing and would love to read about his ocean-going adventures.


This is another wonderful classic maritime novel that I have yet to read and add to my collection. An entertaining tail of a man who wanted to sail and explore the globe, but winds up with what seems like the leakiest boat in the world, this book has been recommended to me by countless people. I really look forward to finding the time to read it.

This is a text that I worked with a lot while on *Roseway*. Its incredibly thorough and detailed explanations and diagrams make it the perfect tool in doing just about any repair or set up in a boat’s rigging. This was an area in which I have a particular interest and skill level, and would love to spend more time reading and learning from Toss’s book.