

Blue

Blue is the Ocean

Blue is the Sky

Betwixt the Two

Happy am I!

That has a nice haiku-ish ring to it doesn't it? And It's a sentiment that I still cling to. Indeed, some of you may recall my first paper here at the Club – in 2009 – when I participated in a Budget titled "On the Water." And here I am on this subject again! Obsessive behavior?? Addictive behavior? More on that later. I'll let you be judge.

In that paper I told how my father took me on a trip to the Chesapeake Bay from our home near Philadelphia; how, as we drove along, he had me stick my hand out the window and feel the wind push my hand up and down; then on a small dock feel the breeze on my face; then joined me in a small sailboat. But why was this so magical; so formative?

First, let's start right down the street at the Taft. I hope that some of you, before this social distancing began, were able to go there and view the *N.C. Wyeth: New Perspectives* exhibition. In that show there are two paintings that count for memories sake. One is from Scribner's 1911 issue of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* that shows a group of pirates boldly striding forward over a beach. The other is of a small sailboat circling just off a dock and a small island.

Why so important? I spent my childhood right next door to Chadds Ford, PA, where NC Wyeth lived, as did the whole Wyeth clan of artists. And most of the books he illustrated were on our shelves: *Treasure Island*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Kidnapped*, *Mysterious Island*, and *Scottish Chiefs*; the story of William Wallace leading the Scots against Edward the First of England to restore the Scottish throne.

In the introduction to *Scottish Chiefs*, Kate Douglas Wiggin recounts her childhood memory of reading this sentence: "Looking up I beheld a young chieftain with a bow in his hand leaping from cliff to cliff, till, springing from a high projection on the right he alighted at once at the head of a wounded deer." She then tells of her childhood reactions to this sentence: "We went leaping around and stumbling and falling. As I remember, we never arrived precisely at the wounded deer, but oh, the delight of the

attempt. So trivial a reminiscence is recounted merely because I feel keenly the value of any work of fiction that can awaken in its readers such ardor of sympathy, such intensity of interest, such a belief in the reality of its characters, such admiration and reverence for their magnificent moments.” She then asks how, “after forty years, can the book again cast the same spell... the reasons being that it is not only enchanting, pathetic, romantic, breathless in suspense, thrilling in its rapidity of movement and astonishing in its wealth of incidents.”¹

In our home there were other books – the ones by CS Forester about Captain Horatio Hornblower, and one more most important – *Swallows and Amazons* – by Arthur Ransome.² It recounts the outdoor play adventures of children old enough to be allowed to go sailing, camping, and fishing, and what they did for exploration and for piracy.

Shortly after that magic sailboat incident on the Chesapeake I found out why my father, Bob Bennett, taught me those things. We went on vacation to an island off the extreme eastern end of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan joining George and Nat Adam, and their son Scottie, from Wheaton, Illinois.

And that’s how Tommy and Scottie got together on the water.

“Bob, didn’t you say you and Tommy had been out fooling around on a sailboat on the Chesapeake?”

“Yes, we did George. He caught on pretty fast – I think he’s ready to try it.”

“Sounds good – Scottie and I got in some sailing on Lake Michigan this past spring. Shall we turn’em loose?”

“Let’s. Tommy – why don’t you and Scotty take the dinghy out in the harbor here and sail her around some?”

“Yay – Scottie, Scottie – let’s go.”

Boys – stay in the harbor ... don’t go out past Fishgut reef, ok?”

“Yes Dad! Yes dad!”

¹ Jane Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs*, Chas. Scribners Sons, New York, c1921, pg vii

² Athur Ransome, *Swallows and Amazons*; Jonathan Cape Ltd., London, 1934

And there she was - a 12 ft dinghy with a hole in the forward seat for a stripped pine sapling mast; a torn bed sheet for a sail handled by an old piece of baling twine; and a canoe paddle trapped under two bent nails on the stern for steering.

"Tommie, let's go – untie that bow line from the dock."

"Ok Scottie- here we go!"

"Give her a good push away from the dock."

"Ok! But why are you telling me what to do?"

"Because I'm the Captain!"

"Huh unh! I should be the Captain! I told you all about those books about Captain Hornblower - and about the Swallows and Amazons! I know them better than you!"

"No you don't! I read 'em too! Besides I'm captain because I'm older!"

"Oh c'mon Scottie! Not much – not even a year!"

"Ten whole months! Besides I've sailed on Lake Michigan before and you only sailed in a little bay! But you can be First Mate!"

"Ok ok! – but I get to steer!"

"No, why? I'm the Captain."

"Captain Hornblower doesn't steer. He may order where to steer but the First Mate does the steering!"

"No, no! As the Captain I get to decide who steers! And besides you have to be the lookout! You know looking for landmarks and rocks. You do – what's it called – navigating - getting the directions with the compass and the sun and all that!"

"Ok ok! They're called bearings! Yeah ... ok, towards Tischer's cabin: that's North!"

The next afternoon our fathers came out in a motorboat, observed our maneuvers, and pronounced us sailors free to go out of the harbor and into the other islands where-ever we wanted.

Stunned and amazed - what a gift to give two young boys and their imaginations. Within hours we had found the little cove on uninhabited Bootjack Island, and our parents let us set up a little camp there for overnights. And we began to lurk around the other islands observing other cabins, boats, and kids or attacking swimming platforms with our cannon, or even boarding them, and so on. Imagination is powerful.

For the next four summers we spent two to three weeks in Michigan hanging out in our sailboat. And then all that summer learning and fun came to a sudden halt. My father died in an accident and my mother wasn't about to make that trek by herself. Our adventures went on hold – but memories of sailing don't.

Twenty years later I met a fellow who worked in downtown New York city as I did and he had a 35' Erickson sloop. He invited me to crew for him on some around the buoys races. The next sailing season he decided to move up and do some over-night distance races along the Sound and out towards Cape Cod. By then he and I had discovered that I had two key talents: I was pretty good at navigation and, perhaps more importantly for navigators, I could go down into the cabin of a moving sailboat and stare at a chart and not throw up!

At about the same time Scottie, who had gone to LA into the movie business, was also getting into bigger boats and offshore fun in Marina del Rey. And while we kept in touch from time to time, we never got back to the little boat at the Island. After all that was kid stuff!

Sea Fever

John Masefield

"I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking."³

³ John Masefield, *Selected Poems by John Masefield*, Carcanet Press, Ltd., 1902

And then I got a chance to move on to the really big stuff. I was at a closing dinner; that's when you celebrate the completion of a financing. Lots of drinking, cigar smoking and "big talk" are de rigeur. The CFO we financed got to talking about how he wanted to enter the Marion, Massachusetts to Bermuda race. His boat "Bonkers" was a 41' Nautor Swan and, like most of the boats, was to be sailed by nine men: captain, cook, navigator, and six other crew paired in three three-hour watches. And big talk led to more big talk and he invited me to join as crew. He already had a navigator who knew celestial navigation well and this race was to be run under what are called "Corinthian" rules: all competitors had to be amateurs and all navigation to be done celestially. But I agreed to go. Why not?

Back to our phrases about the foundations of memory: breathless in suspense; rapidity of movement?

The race starts in six classes but, with over 100 sailboats entered, that's about over 15 boats per start; all dashing and spinning and maneuvering with lots of shouting about right of way trying to be first over the line to get the best start! Rapidity of movement; Breathless in suspense! You bet! Can we be first over without crashing someone else?

But remember that other word she used: pathetic! All this dashing around spinning and maneuvering threatening to wreck a forty-foot sailboat for a few foot advantage with 665 miles to go!

But then the beauty. We cleared Buzzards Bay tower in the late afternoon and headed for Bermuda with other sailboats all around us. We headed into the sunset and evening when there were running lights in every direction. It was truly enchanting: the weather was clear, the winds steady from the SW, the seas calm and she moved smoothly and quickly ahead. Oh, do you know why blue water sailors call their sailboats "She?" It is pretty simple really; beautiful gentle curves, smooth and sensual motion, and a mind of her own!

And there are comic moments along the way. I got paired with Wally Stuard on our watches. Probably because he was close to 70 and very experienced and I was a newbie. His wry humor showed up early. The very next morning we came up on deck at dawn to take our watch and looked around. Oh, they are called watches, not shifts, because that is what you do. You watch the course and the sails for direction and speed.

"Where is everybody Wally? I don't see another boat: no hulls at all; no mast lights; no sails; what the hell?"

“Oh my gosh Tom. Do you think we’re so far ahead? Look aft!”

“No one – not a light or a sail or a mast.”

“Oh oh! Maybe we’re way behind? Or lost?”

“How can we be lost Wally? In the log the guys wrote we’ve been holding the course all night. Oh, oh, wrong course? I’ll call Captain Bonks.”

“Tom, Tom my friend. Do you know why we can’t see them? First, there’s the curvature of the earth: that takes almost a foot off what we can see at about a mile. Couple that with swells about five feet and at a mile something over seven feet might be seen. Our cabin top is only maybe four or five feet above the waterline so you’re not going to see a cabin top a mile away unless it’s humongous. And aluminum masts, white sails against white clouds.”

“Tom my friend, you should know exactly the same thing happened to me my first ocean race!”

That evening the navigator – Fred Ayres - came up with his sextant to take some shots of early evening stars. I liked navigation so I asked Fred to tell me what he was doing. Enchanting to a once upon physicist from a family of them! And Fred took to teaching me, and letting me do sun, moon and stars shots. Learning by doing implants memories that never fade.

That race did have my first storm ... The third night out the wind blew up with gusts over 30 knots; the ocean turned dark green, and the sky – what sky? We were flying, pounding and bouncing with the tiniest sail you can imagine. Everyone got very wet, very bruised and very tired. But the next morning was calmer and we heard a very faint radio call. A boat had broken her mast and was looking for assistance. They were able to give a rough position and we seemed close. Sure enough they soon came into view; and not a happy sight! The mast was bent over and tied off to the stern railing. Their antenna was taped to the mast stump which is why the signal was so weak. They said they were ok but they wanted to tell the race committee they weren’t racing and would start motor sailing on a little jury rig they were putting together. They asked if we had any diesel we could spare.

Captain Bob was about to reply when Jimmy Hannold, another crew member, said: “Hold on Bonks! I know that boat. They have women in their crew! Captain, you tell them, “They give us women - we help. Otherwise no help!”

That race ended at dusk on our fifth day out. And the racing instructions directed that if you ended the race after 500 pm you were to anchor there in the harbor near the finish line and spend the night there rather than attempting to come around in the dark through the reefs to Hamilton where the inns were and the boats would be docked. Captain Bonks started looking for where to anchor and Wally came through! "Like hell I'm spending another night inside this floating pig sty. Eating warmed over casseroles, smelling like an overheated gym. So what if their channel lights are like pen lights. I was here in the war and know the way. Besides I need a drink and my honey is waiting! We're going."

Well, we went. It was pretty but a little nerve wracking. And the marker lights were tiny. Wally said they were installed that way during the war to make it hard for the Nazi's to find their way around while the locals could still manage. After the war, they could think of no reason to change them since the cruise ships and freighters could always hire a Bermudian pilot!

We made it about 9 pm and the pretty evening turned truly beautiful. The Inn where we docked had prepared a welcome; about forty feet of table, tubs of ice filled with oysters, clams, crab legs, lashings of cold beer and wine, and so on. And standing and waving, nine women dressed nicely for the evening; wives, girl-friends, lovely.

So we stumble off the boat – you stumble a lot when, after five days of moving surfaces, you encounter something flat that doesn't move; then up the steps onto the lawn and into the arms of the lovelies - very briefly. Why briefly?

Well, within ten to fifteen minutes the sailors are on the down-wind side of the table quickly grabbing beer, wine, drinks, seafood and all the women are on the upwind side. You can imagine; nine men who just spent five and a half days in a 40 foot long, 14 foot wide, container called a sailboat. That is only slightly more space per person than the usual solitary confinement cell. And those cells have showers. Water is heavy so racing sailboats carry as little as is safe; no showers! And we are pretty much always wet – if not from the sea then from inside foul weather gear. Smelly - ugh!

And then suddenly there are only lovely women around the table. All the sailors have been given their appropriate room keys and have stumbled off; remember the ground is still not moving and beer and rum drinks have been added to the sailors stability! And all those stumbling fellows have very clear instructions on showering and putting all sailing clothes in a tightly sealed plastic bags for the laundry. And life resumes.

Despite the obvious depredations, two years later I got my chance to be the navigator on Bonkers since Fred Ayres couldn't make the trip. And, having regaled my friend Scottie about my first serious offshore, he agreed to join the crew. So, Captain and Navigator were once again on the water – albeit greatly changed – and he wasn't the captain.

From my point of view that year was quite exciting. I was going to put my navigation skills to a real test but I felt that Fred's training, and my continued study, would stand me in good stead. Even so I was feeling a little daunted. For example, from the starting point on Buzzards Bay you are aiming for Bermuda, which is only 24 miles long. From a distance of 650 miles that is about one degree of compass direction! And the next stop if you miss is either the eastern tip of Brazil or the West Coast of Africa. Best not to miss!

But the fun part of navigation on this trip is how to get across the Gulf Stream. It flows roughly from Cape Hatteras north east towards Europe between Cape Cod and Bermuda at speeds of close to 5 knots. Why is detecting it so important? Well, If you are in a 41 foot sailboat doing well your best speed is about 7 knots. And therefore Bermuda is only about four days away. But if the Gulf Stream is running against you, and if you headed right into it, you would only make 2-3 knots over the ground and Bermuda is about ten days away.

Detecting the Gulf Stream is pretty easy. It is warmer water so you look for a rise in water temperature. Secondly, as the warmer water of the Gulf Stream evaporates and hits the cooler ambient air of the surrounding ocean, it condenses forming small clouds. Good for knowing you have found it but not too helpful for sun and star navigation.

But what makes it really exciting is that the Gulf Stream isn't just a simple current. Because of the ocean bottom and the interaction of saltier water with surrounding cooler water, the Stream throws off eddies; spiraling currents in the midst of, and along the sides of, the main Gulf Stream current.

The morning of the third day out I took a sun shot at 6:00 a.m. and compared the indicated position with the previous positions from the log. Oh oh! That can't be right! Only four miles since 3:00 am? It was a 6:00 am shot so the sun position is tricky because at that hour the sun is low on the horizon and there's more atmospheric

bending in how you get the light. I tried three more times and got almost the same readings. Ah ha! Had to be a Gulf Stream eddy! But what kind of an eddy where?

Think for a moment as if you are entering a clock from 9:00; in a clockwise spin the current against you is from 6:00; so you what to turn left towards 1200 to get the lift. If the spin is counterclockwise just the opposite! Turn away from 12 towards 6:00! So which way was the spin?

We were pretty sure we were already into the Stream so the eddies were likely clockwise eddies. If we were so slow then we had probably been running into the eddy in the 6:00 direction which put us against its current. So we turned towards 12 o'clock to pick up the spin to hopefully lift us back on course. And I crossed my fingers. I was pretty anxious as I took a 9:00 a.m shot! But it showed us having put on almost 27 miles in those three hours; or close to our boat speed plus 2 knots per hour. Happiness abounded since I knew we really weren't good enough sailors to get that speed out of her without the current lift.

The rest of that trip went smoothly and Scott and I reminisced a lot about our years in Michigan and told each other tales about our sailing adventures. Then he suggested I come West and navigate for him in the Marina del Rey to Puerto Vallarta race. He pointed out that, while it is a long race, they do it in legs with rest anchorages in between so it's not so grueling so I agreed.

Sailing

by Dorothy Allen

Swiftly cutting through the water,
Falling spray on either side,
Coyly dipping,
Rising, skipping,
Borne along by wind and tide,
Merrily my boat doth glide.

Oh, the sunlight, how it flickers,
Showering diamonds on the way!
Madly dancing,
Shining, glancing,

Slyly beckoning, come and play,
Be, like us, bright, free, and gay.

And I sing a song for gladness,
Send it echoing toward the sea;
I am happy,
Happy, happy!
Blow ye winds! Blow joyfully,
Nor sigh; but sing and laugh with me.⁴

We took off from Marina del Rey and angled offshore to the SW to avoid San Diego and once clear headed back more easterly to close the Mexican shore as it curves going south from the US. It was beautiful weather, steady winds and navigation was pretty easy since GPS was permitted and celestial was just for the fun of the navigator or for emergencies. Then, well south down the coast of Baja, I was rudely awakened one night by Scottie.

“Wake up! Wake Up! Where the hell are you taking us?”

“What, what?”

“There’s a damn city off to starboard behind us... but if we’re heading south any city has to be on our left! There’s nothing but the Pacific Ocean to the right.”

“What? What’s the compass course?”

“Well it says about 160 degrees.... But it must be broken.”

“Ok, ok I’m coming up.”

“Look, Tom. Look over there!”

“O.M.G. Where the hell are we? Those lights shouldn’t be there! What’s direction on the binnacle compass?”

“Southeast! My hand compass says the same!”

“What’s the GPS reading now? South or North of where we were at midnight?”

⁴ Dorothy Allen, *Sailing*, DiscoverPoetry.com, 2020

“Says we’ve gone further south. Are there any magnetic anomalies along this coast? Wait – what’s that radio noise?”

“Sailboats, sailboats. Ja, das ist der cruise ship Van Dam heading 170 degrees off your starboard. Ve vill pass you to zat side well offshore Please stay clear.”

It was a fun race. And then Scottie decided we ought to do the big one; The Pacific Cup from San Francisco to Hawaii. It is a long one of almost 2500 nautical miles – or ten to twelve days in Scott’s 51 foot custom sloop. Leaving San Francisco it was unbelievably stormy but start we did. We were using the tiniest sail you could imagine and were still pounding ahead very fast. We cleared the Farallons and headed for Hawaii and the stormy weather continued for four days. Talk about wet! Talk about bruised! Talk about sleepless! On the fourth morning I had my moment of fame. Emerging on deck to check our progress and course, I looked at Scottie on the wheel and said: “Scottie – beam me up.”

But ahead of us was the Pacific High; the major navigational problem. All cyclonic weather systems spin in such a way that there is no wind at all in the center, then very intense winds at the beginning of the rotation near the center, and then diminishing winds as you get further from the center. And from weather broadcasts you know what the central pressure is, so you use your barometer to tell you how close to the center you are without falling into no wind at all.

On all these races, as a safety precaution, all ships radio in their positions once a day. Charting these you can tell what everyone else is guessing about where the sweet spot is relative to the high. And after the sixth day we seemed to be pretty fast position wise but somewhat to the south of the fleet. But our barometer was reading awfully close to the broadcast values for the center of the high.

“Scottie – I’m not sure I like our position. We’re below the straight line, and most of the fleet, but our barometer reading is pretty high. I wonder if they’re getting too close to the center of the high and running out of wind; especially if the High has shifted south a little like it sometimes does.”

“Where do you say we were relatively? Yes, I see your plots. And yes, barometer looks high. The barometer is working all right?”

“Well, I tapped it a few times but it seems pretty steady. I suppose we could take it apart and clean it.”

“Oh hell, I meant to have the marina do that before we left.”

We weren't even close to the high so we finished pretty well back in the pack but not embarrassingly slow. And at the finish party; well, is this sick; picture this; we have made it to the Kaneohe Yacht Club in Oahu. We are, as you already know, beat. And I am sitting at a table facing the questioner. I am exhausted; the drink in my hand will put me on the floor if I am not careful. I've just finished the longest race I've ever done. I haven't slept well for almost a week and a half; and last night when I could have slept the bed wouldn't be still. Bruised everywhere; just finished almost ten days of eating mediocre whatever; just had my first shower in a week – you know the drill. And the questioner says:

“Hey Tom! I'm thinking of doing Annapolis Bermuda next year. Think you could navigate for me?”

I stare at him. My left brain says, “After all this mess the answer is fuck no! No Way in Hell! What - you think I'm crazy?”

But my right brain has my voice saying, “Sure. I think we can work it out!”

Now what do you think? Is that not sick addictive behavior?

Or is it just the power of imagination?

After the Pacific Cup Scott, smarter or perhaps less addicted than I, decides he's done with the racing but that it's time to go around the world if he can get his wife to agree. Turns out she does; and I get my wife to agree to meet them some places to do a leg or so.

A Life on the Ocean Wave

by Epes Sargent

A life on the ocean wave,
A home on the rolling deep,
Where the scattered waters rave,
And the winds their revels keep!
Like an eagle caged, I pine
On this dull, unchanging shore:
Oh! give me the flashing brine,
The spray and the tempest's roar!

Once more on the deck I stand
Of my own swift-gliding craft:
Set sail! farewell to the land!
The gale follows fair abaft.
We shoot through the sparkling foam
Like an ocean-bird set free;—
Like the ocean-bird, our home
We'll find far out on the sea.

The land is no longer in view,
The clouds have begun to frown;
But with a stout vessel and crew,
We'll say, Let the storm come down!
And the song of our hearts shall be,
While the winds and the waters rave,
A home on the rolling sea!
A life on the ocean wave!⁵

Remember our phrase about memory: how about stunning beauty!

This part starts when Scottie needs to get back to LA from Hawaii. Because the Pacific High sits where it does, you can't go straight back to the US in a sailboat. Your choices are to head for the north east part of South America and pound your way up the west coast against the prevailing winds, or you can go north and swing east around the high using its prevailing winds into Alaska and down the western coast of Canada and the US. Obvious choice. So Annie and I met Scottie and his wife Jean in Juneau Alaska for the trip down the Inside Passage.

One afternoon about halfway down the passage I'm on the wheel looking ahead and I hear a sudden whooshing sound to my right. I look and not twenty feet away there is what looks like a black bowling ball staring at me! I jump some and then realize it's a whale's eye. And as quickly it dives out of sight. So I go back to looking around at the sights; to my left in the distance, across the rolling waves, a rocky shore, some forest rising strongly upward along the ridges and mountains. Then suddenly a leap and splash

⁵ Epes Sargeant, *A Life on the Ocean Wave*, PoemHunter.com, c 1880

and the tail waves. And just above it two bald eagles flying, and in the far distance snow blowing off a high mountain ridge. Who needs a camera when you have memory.

The second place we met them was in the Gambier Islands; that's the far southeastern part of Polynesia. They were going to get there from the Galapagos Islands via Easter Island and on to the Gambiers. For us to meet them we flew to Tahiti, and then took the once weekly flight to the big city in the Gambiers; 1400 people. But, as we were landing, we looked at what boats we could see in the harbor and weren't sure we saw them. "Whoops - what if Quest isn't here yet? This is only a once a week flight so I guess we will need a hotel. As we left the plane we saw the gate agent loading the return flight and asked for a recommendation. She smiled very politely and said, "Oh there are no hotels here. When Polynesians outside Tahiti travel, and night comes, they just walk up to a house and explain. Most families here have a guest room and meals they share willingly. Of course, you can give a gift but you don't have to."

Now that is a revelation about a truly friendly welcoming culture: free AirBnB long before AirBnB.

Actually Scott and Jean were there and we hung out for a few days in Rikitea, that big capital, and then headed North to the Marquesas Islands, They are the Northeastern part of Polynesia. And that was the last time we saw Scott and his wife. They continued on to the West through the Pacific, into Indonesia, the Philippine's, then Southeast Asia to India and finally Mumbai where they joined a convoy to carry them to the Red Sea, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean.

The next time we had anything to do with Scott and Jean was at an event in Marina del Rey. While there I had occasion to read these lines from Alfred Lord Tennyson's Ulysses:

Ulysses (lines 54-70)

Alfred Lord Tennyson

"The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come my friends,
Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are.
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

I read that when I performed Scott's funeral. He and his wife Jean were murdered by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden when their boat became separated from its' convoy in February 2011.

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Betwixt the two

Happy am I!

Thanks for your time.