The Island Reader

Anthology of Maine
Island Artists & Writers

Volume 16
Summer 2022

The Island Reader

Jack and Jill of All Trades Edition

Summer 2022

Front cover image by
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Matinicus

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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.

Ellen Vaughan
Monhegan

Letter from the Editors

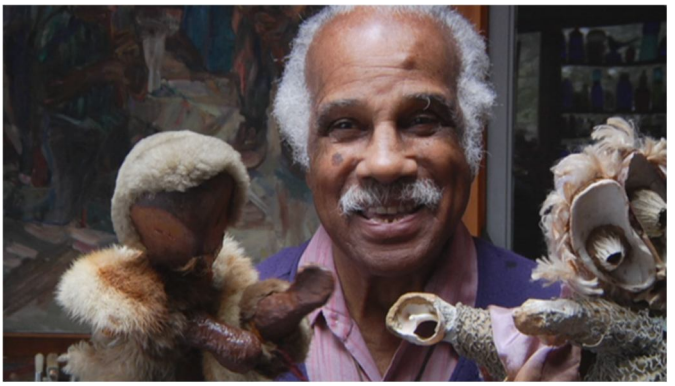
The Island Reader, a vocation of poems, paintings, stories, images, and conversations, comes around once a year. This year's "Jack and Jill of All Trades" edition finds islanders at their finest: working, playing, creating, and living their best lives where the sky meets the ocean and where the ocean surrounds us.

Running excavators, captaining skiffs, moms and dads and kids, aunts and uncles and friends work at whatever needs to be worked on. Maine coast islanders—winter, spring, summer, and fall—get things done.

We want to thank Maine Seacoast Mission for funding and distributing *The Island Reader*. Plus, special thanks to the writers and artists who submitted work. Island voices are the voices of hard working, loving, and creative people.

And lastly, thank you, readers everywhere who support us with donations. Your generosity is appreciated. Donations make it possible for Maine Seacoast Mission to showcase the artists published inside these pages.

Happy reading.



Volume 16 is dedicated to Ashley Bryan, artist, writer, author, island neighbor and friend whose beautiful spirit will never stop inspiring us.

SONG

Sing to the sun
It will listen
And warm your words
Your joy will rise
Like the sun
And glow
Within you

Sing to the moon
It will hear
And soothe your cares
Your fears will set
Like the moon
And fade
Within you

Ashley Bryan
Islesford

Sternperson

The sternman is not
Just a man anymore, now
Unisex Grundens

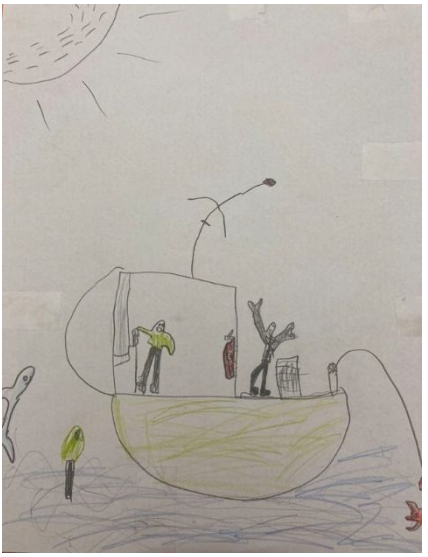
Dexter Lee
Swan's Island

Jenny Turner
Swan's Island

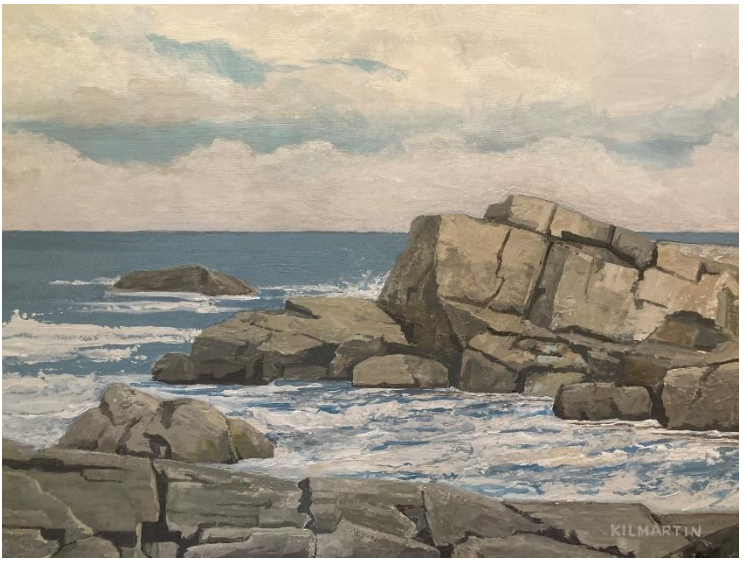
And if I don't want to give it all to poetry?

Can't we just eat together, shield our eyes
at midday, talk for hours with no thought
of putting it to page? I could lean into
the slicked tiles of the shower
as long as the water stays hot, and when I go
to bed, fall fast asleep against the weight
of a good dog. There are worse ways
to waste a life. Especially if the poetry is never
very good. How does one write a poem
better than blueberry pie or beef stew, anyway?
Why not just make the pie and call it a day, a lie, a life?

Hilary Clark
Islesboro



Wolfie Martin
Matinicus



Tom Kilmartin
Peaks Island

Laura Venger
Frenchboro

Washed Ashore

tossed overboard
broken away from original form
rolled and dragged along
refined by time and tumble
the roughest parts reshaped, worn down
losing mind and gaining soul
on to purpose, redefined
washed ashore, finally.

Lydia Johnson
Great Cranberry Island

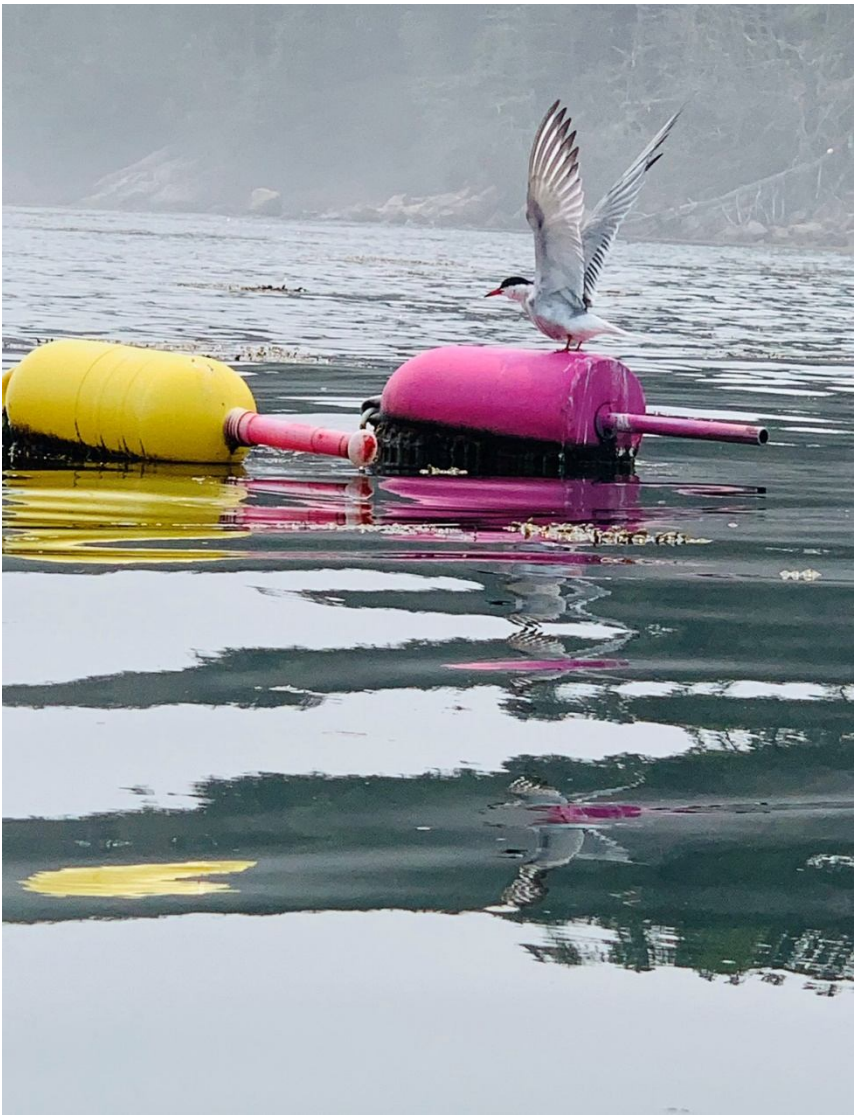
Courtney Landers
North Haven

Hauling Time

The lobster boats' lights
sparkle like stars
on the black sea
as I fly over Maine coast
pre-dawn darkness
Bar Harbor to Boston
so many bright LED lights
dotting the ocean bay below
amongst the islands
lobster men and women haul traps
up through the depths
each trap brings up a memory
breaks the surface into the present
as we contemplate the future
sustaining the lives of many
lobster boats lights, like stars
form constellations on a dark ocean
shine up to the dawning day
as we navigate our course.

Stefanie Alley
Little Cranberry Island

Sparks Martin
Matinicus



Chelsea Perry
Isle au Haut

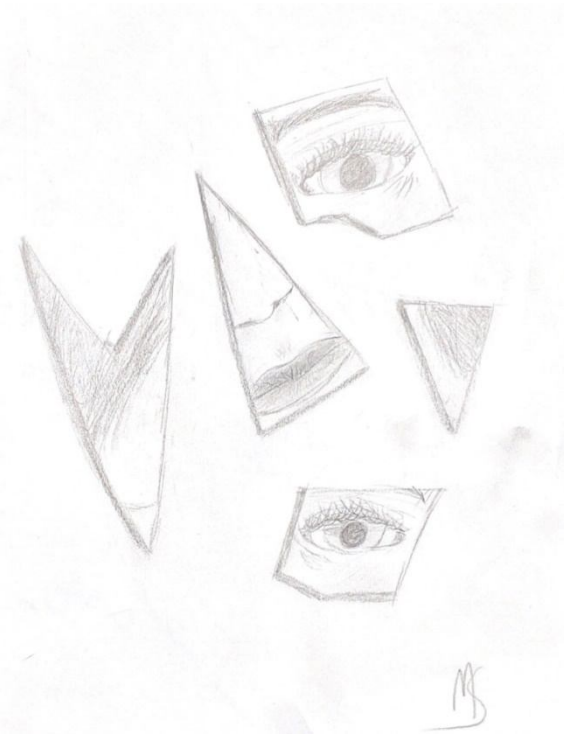
When The Snow Settles

I see you on the shelf,
waiting to be picked up
and shaken.
Such a charming thing,
a world unto yourself,
effortlessly maintained.
Tiny trees rest on hills
as big as a thimble,
entirely self-contained.
In that space
you will always remain—
but for the swirling snow—
unchanging and unchangeable.
Will that little skiing man
ever arrive to the chalet
and join the others,
drinking their hot chocolate?
Is he safe
in that swirling blizzard?
Will he ever find
his way home?
When the snow settles
does his heart ache
for the farthest shores,
warm, smooth sands,
and the scent of jasmine
carried on a breeze?

Perhaps it's best
if he dreams
because just next to him
sits Scheherazade
on a camel
in a terrible sandstorm.

She also dreams
of the Alps, new powder,
and long gazes of love
over steaming hot mugs.
With a nudge
they could be as one
but then their worlds
would be undone.

Weston Parker
Swan's Island



Melanie Sanborn
Great Cranberry Island

All things do

Moon-made silver treetops rise to greet a gaze
cast down from the night's pupil
cloudy lids pass in a slow blink
I melt into the shadows
knocking stones loose from the shoreline
At the edge I inch ankle deep into waves
wiggling numb toes among
kelp, cut rope, dead water
A bell buoy lazily rolls to its side, back again
in no real effort to warn midnight sailors
of a shallow ledge
I drank stars like wine
making burdens drunk in my belly
Love letters to the dead flow from my hands
as they cup the waves
to wash death clean
To become salted, fresh
water drips from my shallow sea
Slipping in sips from my palms into the black
I'd wade in to be born again
but the night's tide may not forgive the living
so I wait, faint pulsed between two depths
of salt and stardust
like all things do.

Alyson Peabody
Matinicus

Laurie Easton Parker
Swan's Island

Sarah Louise (Kuntz) Teague and “When I Am Older”

I was on a Casco Bay ferry when I first met Sarah. After exchanging pleasantries, she pointed at the chainsaw I was carrying and asked, “You any good with that thing? I’ve got this limb; it’s been botherin’ me.” At the time I considered myself serviceable, even adept, and replied, “Where exactly do you live?”

I arrived at Sarah’s home on Long Island later that day. After nearly 30 minutes of coffee and conversation at her kitchen table, I said, “Better get to that limb before it gets dark.” I completed the task, put the wood and chainsaw in the back of my truck, and started the engine.

Sarah came to the porch, “Wait a minute. I want to pay you!” Recalling my paternal grandfather’s words and my Maine upbringing, no money should ever be exchanged between neighbors. Looking slightly concerned, Sarah asked, “Do you like crab meat?” I left with a pint of fresh seafood and gave Sarah my cell phone number in case any other issues arose.

After that day, Sarah would call occasionally with a small chore. After long stints off island, I would stop by her house and knock on the door. Sarah would invite me in, offer me a cup of coffee and a baked good regardless of the hour. A few years later, Sarah hosted my daughter for tea and gave her a pair of handmade mittens when Halsey lived on the island during senior year at USM. Ironically, Sarah later visited me at Maine Med after I’d had an accident cutting down trees on my property. Seeing I was on the mend and would be left “on the right side of the sod,” Sarah quietly offered, “You need to get well and get out of here. Hospitals are not healthy environments.”

At the age of 96, Sarah Louise (Kuntz) Teague passed away peacefully on Dec. 5, 2021, at her home on Long Island. Her favorite poem was Jenny Joseph's "Warning" about an older, independent woman who knew how she wanted life to be, especially at the end. In Sarah's honor, I've borrowed Joseph's meter and theme to compose the following:

When I Am Older

When I am older, I shall continue to wear bow ties
with matching shirts, pants, socks, and belts which say me,
Yes, I will occasionally spend my savings on properties and
projects, and argue about the prices

of each. I shall sit atop ferry cushions and eye crew
members' rope tosses, soak up delicious rumors with suds,
press politely for details, and only offer opinions for or
against public rants while balancing age with the

innocence of youth. I shall go outdoors in the rain wearing
my LL Bean slip-ons, pick flowers in public (or private)
gardens for my lapel, and continue to expectorate (and
urinate) cautiously beyond the crowd. Anyone can wear

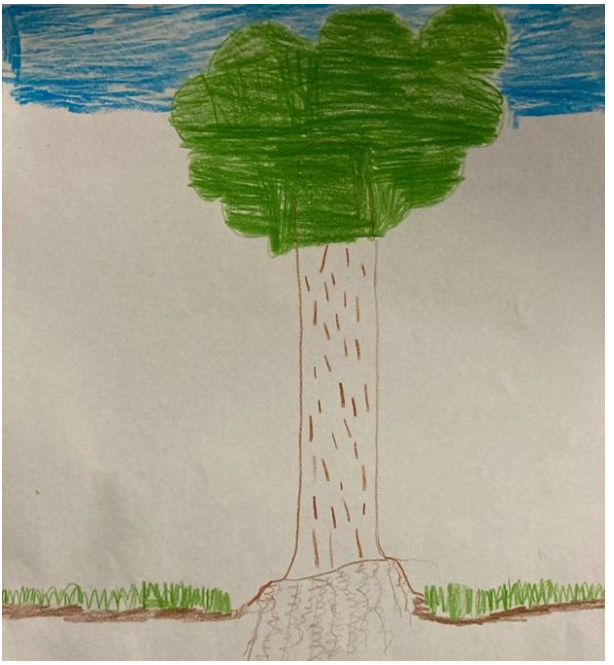
untucked shirts and grow fatter, eat ounces of simple sugars
at every turn, or consume chips and dips (even avocados)
for a week, while hoarding coupons, coasters, and canned
goods in cupboards. For now, I will keep cards

and words close to the vest and cheek, pay loans and
mortgages, and hold my biases nearer to home. Discussing
essential skills to kids, courts, and classrooms, we should
all host dinners, wear masks, and discuss headlines. Maybe

I ought to try out my tranquility truce now by sharing

quiet confidences with quaint conspirators so folks won't feel aghast, cheated, or faint when suddenly I'm seen slightly older, but shockingly still the same.

Darren L. Redman
Long Island



Eli Philbrook
Matinicus

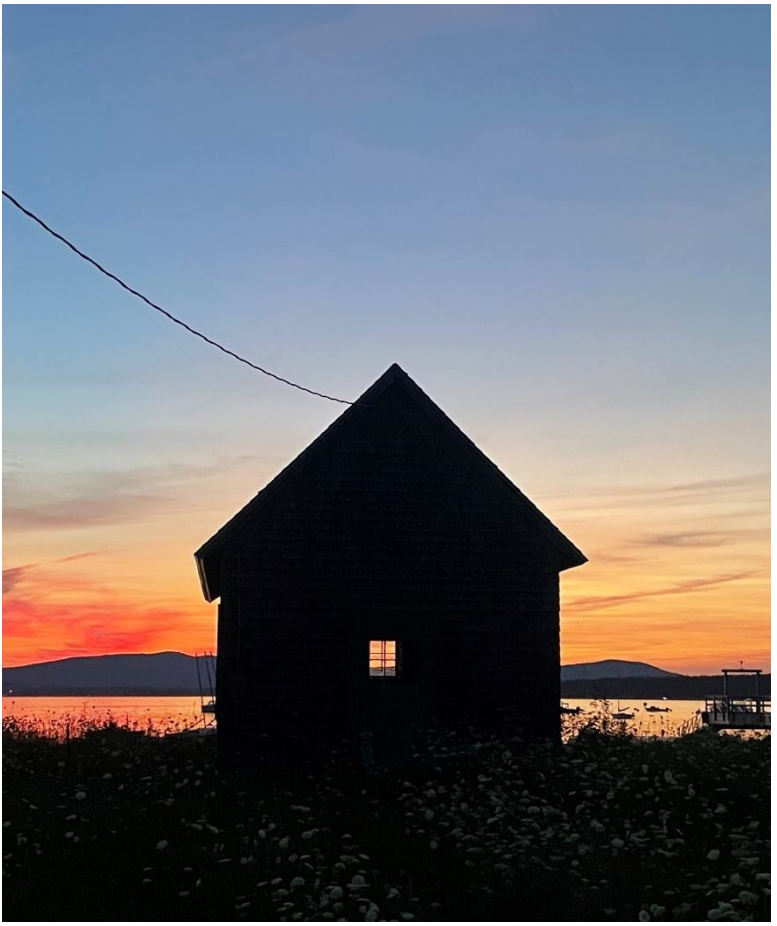
Stewardship

Wabanaki
People of first light
Stewards of the land, of the islands
  And the sea
Hunted, fished, gathered,
Revered the earth
  And all living things
Harmony

Ownership
Conquerors came
Took and took
Brought disease and starvation
Killed, enslaved, traumatized, erased
  And left an empty land,
  And broken culture
Genocide

But, The indigenous peoples “are still here”
Strong, vibrant, diverse
They have much to teach us
Will we pay attention
  And save the land,
  And ourselves
Redemption

Barbara Carter
Peaks Island



Starr Cummin Bright
Islesford

Great Blue Herons

Along the Passage
Wait with me
For the changing of the tide

Brian Arsenault
Long Island

Green Beans

Gone hungry as a child, he
counted on beans.
Rows and rows of aching back.
His job to plant, mine to pick.
Heavy dew, danger
of rust he says.
Wait ‘til it dries.
In moist, sweet air, I

recline on the culvert slope. Above my
head, red-striped wings surf emerald waves.
They trill my soul to the cloudless sky.
Lawnmower noise—my sister’s job—
calls me back.

Shirt logy with sweat before the
first pound is picked.
Burning sun on blond skin.
I eat each time I stretch.
Bean fuzz rasps my tongue.
Basket heavy as a napping
child, I breach

the steaming kitchen door.
Beans overflow the sink. My
mother, flanked by
hot jars, recoils.
Well, she says, wiping sweat from
my face then her
own with her damp apron hem.
Well
I suppose we'll be glad to
have them in
January.

Janis Petzel
Islesboro

Bev McAloon
Swan's Island

On a Rocky Shore

On an island with a rocky shore,
gigantic slabs draped in yellow weed
thrust their brawn into the waves, and stones—
washed and rattling on the beaches, signal us—
draw us to the shore again— the notorious frontier.

We gawk at the stony multitudes
shoveled out of the vast beyond.
Our laughter mingles with crows and pines, as
over the rocks we balance our way down to the waves.

The ocean throws them out in billions—
rocks like jewels piled along the beach,
some of its offerings
brightened with every slosh—
enticements from domains we cannot know.

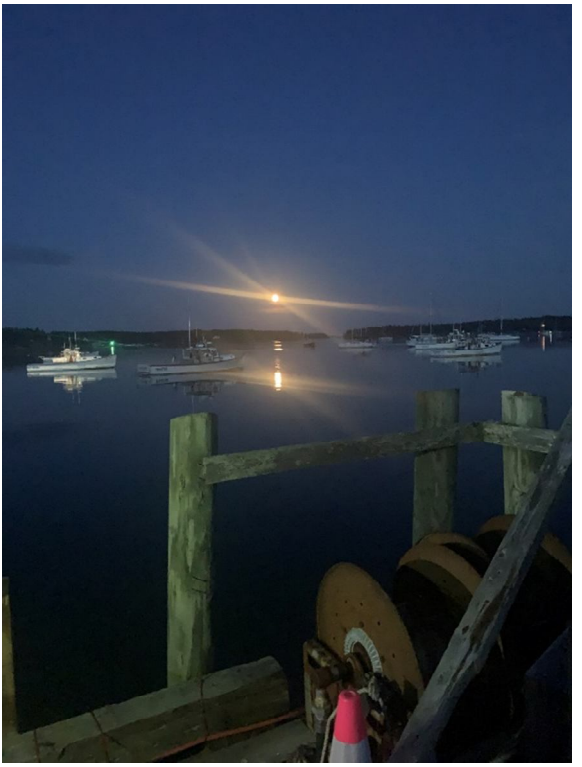
We're welcome to handle them—
speckled, striated, oval—smooth, granular—
some near-perfectly round—
dazzling in the most unspectacular way.
I pick one up and hold it—
beautiful, indifferent;
it has a secret story of its own.
I put it in my pocket. I'll take it home.
On my desk it will be a souvenir of our vacation—
of the ocean's engaging presentation.

I'll imagine molten towers rising out of the sea—
and the stone's descent
from stardust to rocky shore, down unmarked
millennia—forbidding eons with continents
crunching into one another—
and the tale continuing
long after the episode of the souvenir.

Where will it go from here?

A page in its history will have to cover us—
or maybe not a page, maybe a paragraph.
A sentence or two. Or maybe
we'll be just one among a long
string of adjectives—in a story that,
as the galaxies losing sight of one another,
there's no time left to tell.

Earl Simpson
Great Cranberry Island



Lily Ellison
Swan's Island

Rachel Deschamps
Matinicus

Jeff Messer
Matinicus Island

A Man I Know

When our parents asked if you could come down
To show us how to make masks
Out of paper mâché and sea glass.
You were 47, the same amount of years ago
when I was six.

The recipe was your own.
When I would go in search of you
Because the day was beautiful and sunny.
I knew you would be painting someone's garden
Or the flowers in the cemetery.
I hid behind the trees
As I watched you mix paints.
I heard you humming softly to yourself.
Come closer, it's hard to see from back there
But I was too afraid
And stayed hidden beneath the bushes.

The elephant puppet has always been my favorite.
His trunk, his head, his arms
Bleached bones washed up on shore
A piece of weathered burlap
The clickity-clack when you bring him to life.

I melt at the rustic sound of your voice
When you raise your arms high
My People! by Langston Hughes
And the crowd echoes every line you say.
I wrote my first college essay about you
I think it was the only reason I actually got in.

The way you greet strangers who come looking for you
Eager to meet Islesford's island legend
As though they were long lost family.
Your house

A veritable treasure trove of gifts from around the world
Each one with a story that never gets old.

The pictures of your parents by your bed
Paintings from the island kids
All hanging on the wall in your dining room
So everyone who comes to visit
Can see who loves you the most.

Kate Savidge
Islesford

Janet Moynihan
Matinicus

Wind Shift

The weather changed
The wind shifted
I tacked away
Aware that the island
On which I had set my sights
Would recede in the distance
To a small speck
And then disappear
I would carry it
And all it meant
In my heart
Wherever I might find myself
Hopeful that what brought me here
Would get me there
Though not without the pain of loss
And a sense of what might have been
If only the weather did not lie in wait
Ever changing
To take me on the only path
That is mine to follow
To create as it recreates me.

Eric Best
Frenchboro

Richard Flagg
Vinalhaven

Jenn Turner
Swan’s Island

Fallen Promises

Riding down a road I've always known not far from home I saw a stunning sight, an angel fallen beautiful surrounded by light.

"Help me please I've fallen. I am weak. I think I've broken my wing?"

My heart was open so she drew what energy she needed from me.

With a rush of air and a blinding flash I awoke 10 minutes in the past; she stood above me, radiant like the sun; she thanked me for what I had done; she asked me my name. I said it was Ken. She said, Thank you, I'm sure we will meet again.

As she spoke she floated down and put a kiss upon my brow and said, "Goodbye for now."

Kenneth McCafferty
Great Cranberry Island

Alissa Messer
Matinicus

The Dance of the Peaches

Fabric flaps wildly on the clothesline.
Towels flail precarious on a single pin,
snapping over sheets strewn on the grass

and the little peach tree braves year three
now loaded yellow and orange in egg-sized
prizes which bob somehow confident,

clinging to the supple branches as they sway,
pointed leaves now yellow, now green
with the wind, the dance more strenuous

than such a young tree seems built to bear.
If it had been spring, the blossoms
would be long gone, the leaves lonesome,

looking like an ordinary deciduous cousin,
but instead, the peaches join the dance,
holding on by some miracle,

strength instilled in the leaf,
in the stem holding on to the leaf,
then holding again

something precious—the still
hardened fruit which appears
in the summer

if the bees, if the rain,
if the sun, if the luck.

Colleen Teasdale Filler
Isle au Haut

John DeWitt
Isle au Haut

Judy Taylor
Baker Island

Flavor

I dig into the rich realm to find joy–soil
undisturbed since autumn, worm casings
blending with decayed roots, tilled compost,
now dark, clumpy humus, draining moisture
from my hands, the earth yearning
for even more water
than supplied by recent rains.
Not all is beneficial in this loam–larva
of Japanese beetles lurk deep, stones
block my trowel-work, ants bite, defending
their nesting site, but the nutrients
are there for all plants, soil density
stabilizing root and stem, for everything
from lithesome peas to tall spruce trees
Each year, I plant seeds in flats, which
live under lights in the basement. I am
brought alive when witnessing the first
cotyledons, often with their tips attached,
caught by the seed's hull. In summer's garden
potatoes thrive deep beneath foliage,
while plump, succulent strawberries flourish
under dark green, curling leaves. I breathe
slowly, breathe deeply when digging.
Eating a freshly dug carrot, just beyond taste,
I catch a subtle aroma at the back
of my throat–like the delicious intensity
of a thin truffle slice. I delight
that from this dirt comes
flavor.

Starr Cummin Bright
Islesford

Alyson Peabody
Matinicus

MEMORIAL FLOTILLA

in memory of David Bunker

Ghostly, as if drifting in from the other side,
they emerged from the fog in a long convoy
of dignity and respect to huddle
in the cove, their engines killed: bobbing
lobster boats, whalers, small craft, a sailer,
to pay tribute to the guy who, for decades,
kept his ferry on schedule
to make life possible for us on this island.
Oh, what we owe him!
Was he ever sober? Even as captain of the barge?
Yes, once he got it, too late,
that drink was doing him in.
No matter.
He brought her home didn't he?
Time after time.
Gruff and bluff, a sort of fearsome kidder,
with eyes bluer than a sun-stunned bay,
he lived for checking his traps, his grandchildren,
feeding birds from his hand,
cooking for his family.
Into the waves he plied most of his days
with a loud-speakered prayer
he'd likely have disdained
went his remains
along with his cribbage board.

Susan Deborah King
Great Cranberry Island

Ellen Harford
Long Island

Ava Kabouchy
Matinicus

Vinalhaven Nor’easter

A Nor'easter is a low-pressure area that often passes just off New England. The intense winds rotate onto land from the Northeast, which means “The Sea.” When you walk out of a Nor’easter, you won’t be the same person who walked into it. That’s how nature's tempest impacts you.

Sitting on the porch I witnessed the ominous clouds gathering at the horizon, nature in charge tonight. The portentous sky was advancing. The blustery wind was steady on my face as white caps built out to sea. In the distance, the surf battled the granite breakers. Normal safety measures had been set in motion, as all outdoor belongings were tied down or packed away. The ferry had stopped service and local fishing boats all found “safe harbor.” I knew trees would fall, power might go out, flooding would occur, but it was exciting. At dusk, the storm hit the Island. Heavy rain and 70+ knot winds made the house shutter eerily.

A father and his two sons decided to go for a walk. Why? Where? And how far was not discussed—it didn't matter. Mom screamed from the bedroom, “You guys are nuts!" Without speaking, we grabbed our rain gear, dressed, and walked a mile to town. I can’t explain why we didn’t speak to one another (usually, you can’t shut us up). But none of us said a single word! We were together in stride, but our thoughts were our own. Sheets of rain in squalls fought our every step. I loved every minute of it. The rain clouds soared across the Island landscape; visibility was murky and ghostly.

We plodded on towards town; every so often we’d pass a home lit by candlelight. Two thoughts developed: either a line is down or the town’s electrical plant blew up. Vinalhaven Light and Power brought electrical energy to

the Island in 1914. It had recently had two of its three generators breakdown and the Island was relying on “Old Faithful,” a 500-kilowatt generator on loan from the Civil Defense to power the community. The town had recently purchased this privately owned company and formed a co-op. The first president of the newly formed Fox Island Electric Cooperative was Grant Duell. Grant was quoted in a Bangor newspaper during this takeover, “We hired a mechanic from Portland to fix the two broken generators, but he didn’t show. He’ll get here.” That is the way of life in Vinalhaven. So, for the last month, the company rationed energy. While half the Island had electricity, the other half didn’t, six hours on, six hours off. Oh! And an article in the *Wall Street Journal* bestowed Vinalhaven Light and Power with the dubious distinction of being the worst Utility Company in the Country. You can’t make this shit up!

We turned the corner at the big flagpole. Down into the heart of the town we trudged, all our senses heightened, nothing spoken. We passed a few streetlights that were on; the bands of rain shimmered like jewels in the light. We made our way through the roaring of the wind and past the dull moan of the Island generator. It was said that at night you could hear the drone of the electrical plant's generator throughout the Island. Oh, how history repeats itself, for that’s the new complaint concerning the environmentally friendly windmills. As we passed the plant, it reminded me of a junkyard. Massive parts were strewn all over haphazard, broken-down trailers, and spools of cable littered the site. But “Old Faithful” was still moaning her generating song.

We entered the ferry parking lot and made a U-turn heading back towards home. Breathing in the fresh, salty, cool, Maine air made me think how lucky I was Grandpa found this haven. As we returned to the house, a cry bellowed from Mom's bedroom, “Stop! Take your wet things off in

the mudroom!" Why you went out in that mess, I'll never know!" We shot a glance at one another; a slight smile grew on our faces. We knew!

Richard Flagg
Vinalhaven

Jessica Elaine DeFrenn
Swan's Island

BEYOND THE HORIZON

About a year ago I heard a verse read at a friend's memorial service and it is embedded in my mind. She was born and grew up in Sweden, and her lifelong friend sent the poem as her way of participating in the commitment. I do not have a copy, but it left an image that provides me comfort. I share it with you and hope it will bring you the same peace it has given to me.

Envision your deceased loved one as a schooner under full sail. It slowly leaves the shore and heads across the sea as you remain behind waving, and shouting, **"Goodbye."**' You continue your farewell as the ship gradually becomes smaller and the difference between you becomes greater. The last few seconds of connection slip away—it is gone. It has passed over the horizon.

At that precise moment a crowd is gathering on another shore. Eager eyes are focused on its horizon. Suddenly a voice calls out, "Here she is! She's coming!" Still under full sail the ship is greeted by waving arms and shouts of **Welcome**.

You, beloved schooner, are not alone. She is being embraced by a crowd of family and friends. She is safely on another shore.

Margret VanOrden Maloney
Matinicus

Sherry Anders
North Haven

Island Life

Up against the pier the skiffs are bashing
And the waves are crashing.
Loon are crying
And gulls are
Flying. Sailboats
Are sailing
And motors are
Failing. This is the
Island Life!

Anica Messer
Matinicus

Gary Peabody
Matinicus

Matinicus

Just an island
The sea is here
Nothing.

Archibald Davies
Matinicus Island

At the End of the Day the Sun Sets

Over the beach,
This is why I love it so much.
To school to learn and to have fun,
This is why I love it so much.
To the ferry I drag my feet,
I don’t want to leave the island I love so much.

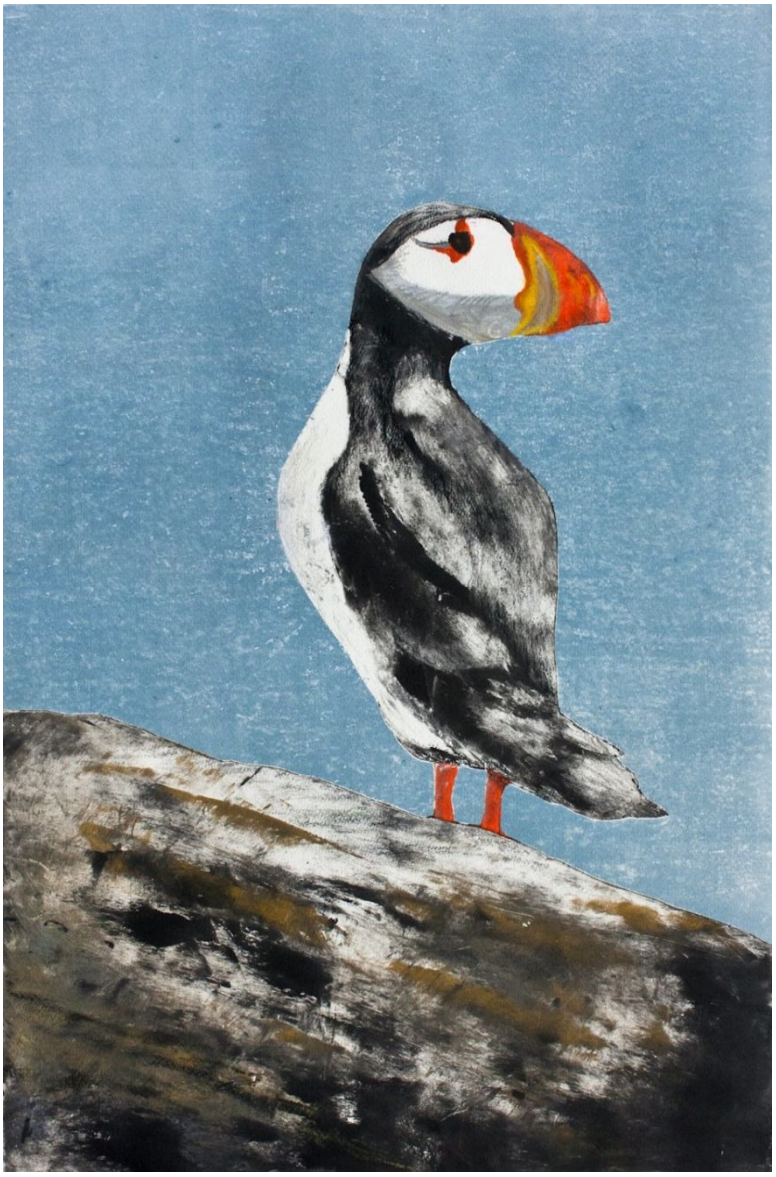
Isabella Messer
Matinicus Island

Rachel Deschamps
Matinicus

Matinicus Senses

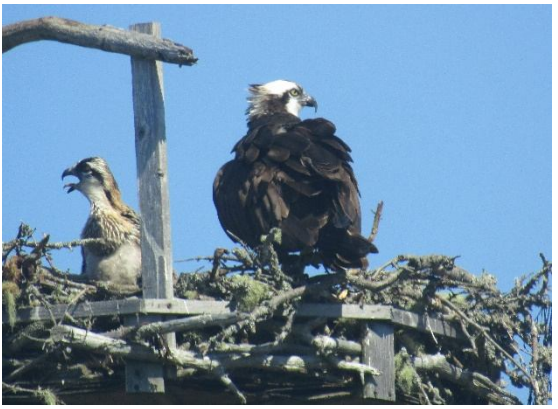
The roads are bumpy
The air is cold
I smell the ocean at low tide.
I hear the clanging of cars
I like to play on the beach and climb on the rocks. It is hard and cold on my feet.
There are potholes everywhere.

Sparks Martin
Matinicus Island



Sharon Whitham
Great Cranberry Island

Island Writers & Artists



(photo credit Kendra Chubbuck, Isle au Haut)

You are invited to contribute your work to

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For complete details visit
www.seacoastmission.org/islandreader

About Maine Seacoast Mission

117 years ago, two Mount Desert Island pastors and brothers, Alexander and Angus MacDonald, sailed a small sloop named *Hope* to isolated islands and lighthouses across the state of Maine. This trip became the first hallmark of Maine Seacoast Mission, the nonprofit they founded in 1905. Today, the organization serves the state's unbridged outer islands and Downeast coastal towns.

Headquartered in the village of Northeast Harbor, the Mission offers islanders numerous medical treatment, social and educational opportunities as well as spiritual and pastoral support through its boat, the *Sunbeam,* and from its Downeast, Cherryfield campus.

Maine Seacoast Mission is thankful to the communities it works alongside. Please visit: www.seacoastmission.org.

(Photo credit, Douglas Cornman)

Baker Island
Frenchboro
Great Cranberry Island
Isle au Haut
Islesboro
Islesford

Long Island
Matinicus
Monhegan

North Haven
Peaks Island
Swan's Island
Vinalhaven

Maine Seacoast Mission