The Island Reader

What Brings You Joy Edition

Summer 2026

Cover image by
Sam Rogers
Matinicus

Title page image by
Max Cornman
Great Cranberry Island

Acknowledgements

Some prose in this anthology has appeared in earlier forms in other publications. We gratefully acknowledge the editors and publishers of those venues for first presenting this work. All material is included here with the permission of the authors and/or original publishers.

Editorial Board

(Photo credit: Margaret Snell, Maine Seacoast Mission Staff)

Table of Contents

The Island Reader offers space for creative self-expression for island artists of all ages and experiences. For example, Islesford and Little Cranberry are two names for the same island. Both names are used interchangeably throughout this anthology. Using the island name submitted by each artist is one way *The Island Reader* honors island identity and islanders' self-expression.

(Photo credit: Gary Rainford, Swan's Island)

Letter from the Editors

What better theme to celebrate the 20th edition of *The Island Reader* than joy? Over the past two decades we have admired artwork that took our breath away and read poems that made us cry. We have fiddled with commas and semicolons and cursed Microsoft Word under our breath. We have made beautiful new connections across islands and said goodbye to old friends. It has been a joy.

Joy might seem difficult to capture on the page in an interesting way. As a concept, it can seem too simple, too boastful, too cloyingly sweet. But in our own lives, joy is seldom any of those things. It exists alongside the mundane, the ugly, and the deeply sad. An ability to find joy in the everyday is essential to living a good life anywhere, especially on an unbridged island. The talented writers and artists featured in this volume explore the theme of the joy of island life in beautiful and unexpected ways.

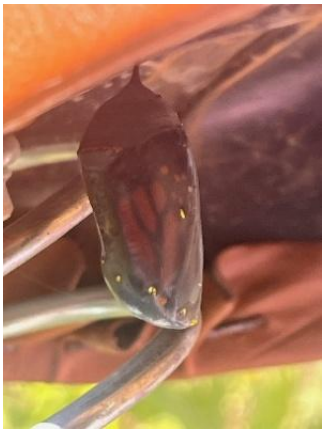
We would like to thank Maine Seacoast Mission for supporting *The Island Reader* and all of the wonderful people who have contributed to, read, and shared this publication over the last 20 years.

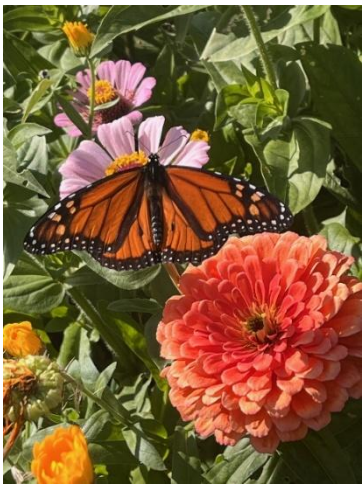
Volume 20

dedicated
to the joy
of Maine

(Photo credit: Captain Mike Johnson, Maine Seacoast Mission Staff)

Lifecycle of a Butterfly





Melanie Greatorex-Way
Monhegan

My Big Old Oak

My big old oak,
in a corner of our backyard, towered over
our little four-square, as oaks do,
knowing the loves and losses of my childhood.

Autumn,
ablaze in its bounty of colors, crowned my big old oak
in orange and alizarin crimson.
And I, looking up into this warm luster, felt protected.

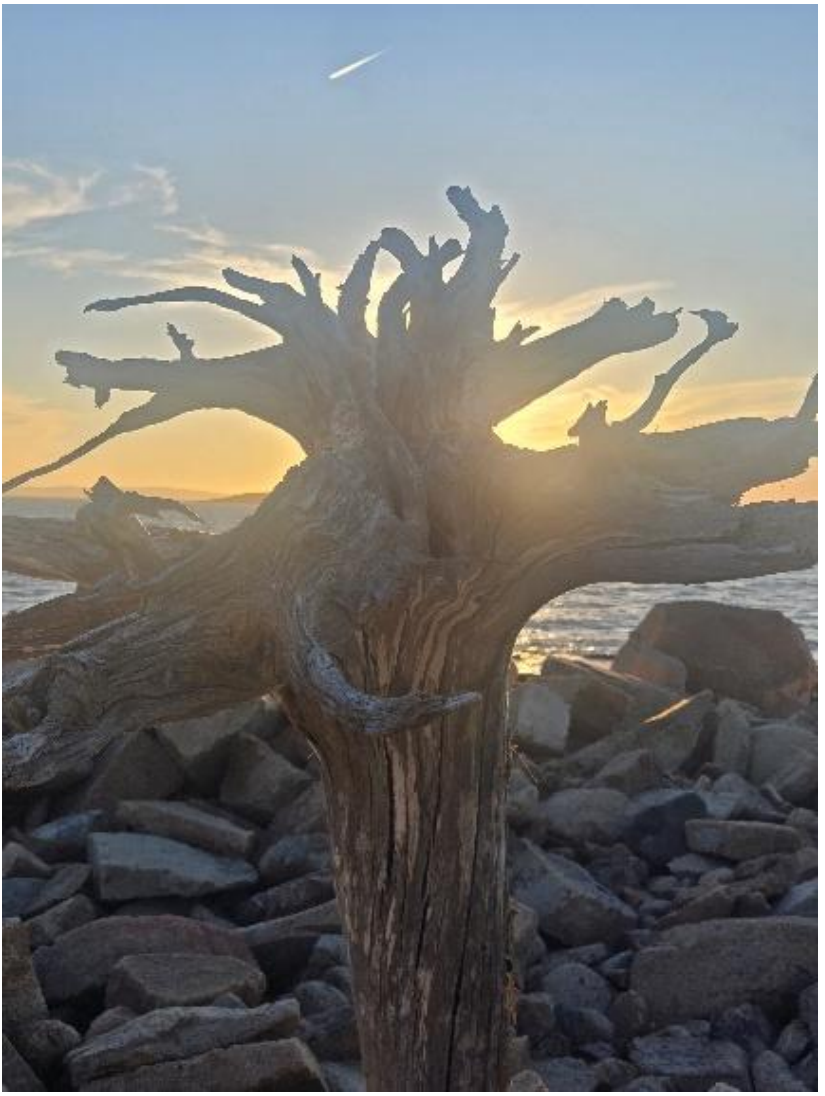
On winter nights
in the refuge of my bedroom,
I would tug aside window shades and watch my oak
offer up a bouquet of stars.

On springtime nights my oak greeted me
with subtle aromas of emerging life, and even as baby
leaves slumbered and the bouquet was harder to see, for the moment,
I thought of love rather than losses.

And summer, Ooh, summer!
Hot and sultry as it was,
three little bodies would escape through our back door and
we three, my brothers and me,
clutching matchbox cars and my Teddy, happily huddled in
the dirt at the foot of my oak.

In glorious, cooling shade, we scrambled over and around
its ancient roots,
and carved forever roads, roads that intertwine
and encircled us all our lives.

Mavourneen Thompson
Peaks Island



James Bruner
Frenchboro

A Sloop Named Goofy

"Sailboats are funny things. Truly pathetic when out of the water, and at once majestic as soon as they're afloat. Eileen, they are goofy personified." –Her dad

The first tote hits the dock with a thud, solid and heavy against the worn planks. She braces herself, secures her footing, and pulls it across the dock, gripping the worn plastic handles as she positions it near the foot of the gangplank. Back aboard, she returns to the bowels of the vessel—her home—and starts on the next one. She shifts her stance as she maneuvers it out of the cabin, onto the deck, and over the gunwale. The weight of it drags at her arms, worsened by the contents jostling sluggishly inside—miscellaneous objects sealed away with tape her father had applied many years ago—now yellowed, loosening with time, and brittle from the salt air. The totes are typically stored as low into the hull as they'll fit—just above the bilge. It's a puzzle to put them back in, so they're rarely removed.

Eileen remembers the last time she and her mother had done this same task. Young men from the boatyard would offer their labor—although she was so young back then that she didn't realize they too were just boys, teens working for the few lousy toonies that her mother could scrounge up. Her mother—Mom—had avoided opening the totes then, and Eileen has followed suit. To this day, she's never bothered to look inside.

Another tote. Then another. They exist as abstractions in a way—dead weight to be managed. The routine: unload, haul, stack, wait. Everything gets stripped away, her home turned inside out and laid bare on the dock. Anything that can be removed will accompany her to a nearby room, where she will wait for the work to be finished. Even when

she was a child, this process was wrought with stress and anxiety. Her and Mom often felt exposed, vulnerable—and locked out of their ability to flee. To have the boat in repair means she is without agency. Eileen's father would have prepared better for these moments, having redundancies in place to ensure everything went smoothly. She doesn't really think like him though—but she's doing the best she can.

Her mom, though uneased by the practice, grudgingly made a ritual of it. Every few years, as needed. Whenever maintenance cannot be put off any longer, the boat is emptied, lifted out of the water, and taken away—given to a trusted outfit of mechanics—the men who will keep the sloop afloat for another expanse of time. The first pull occurred about four years after they escaped. Four years of the boat being in the water, and never having once been given a look over. The number of barnacles that had caked onto the hull was a nauseating sight for any sailor. She remembers the way her mom would pace the docks, casting anxious glances towards the horizon, wondering how they would escape if they had to. So, they delayed the chore as much as they could, waiting for the perfect moment in terms of weather, finances, political rest, minimal law enforcement presence—and going on a general gut instinct that it was the ideal time.

Superseding all of the factors is the choice of boatyard. Most boatyards, in their experience, are operated by conservatives who care more about money than people. Their chief business, after all, is the babysitting of luxury property. Of course, there are outliers in everything. Finding this one took a lot of visits, and caused her mom a lot of sleepless nights. If Mom made a wrong decision, they would be stuck wherever they landed. If they waited too long and the boat couldn't be repaired, they were

permanently stuck regardless—so the surrounding community was also a consideration.

"Hypothetically," Mom once said, "If we make a deal with an American sympathizer, we are at risk of being kidnapped and returned stateside."

It was a delicate dance they had to constantly maintain, and the fear of losing their footing—*the balance*—ruled their lives. Eileen didn't look forward to continuing in the same way. She is already brainstorming another way to live—searching for something better—but for now, this is all she knows.

The final tote lands on the dock with a tired thud, and Eileen thinks she hears the cracking of the decking. She straightens, rolling her shoulders. Turning her gaze to the serenity of the bay, she notices the water is calm, a glassy blue stretching out towards a horizon she has yet to explore. Around her, the marina is quiet except for the occasional call of a seagull or the creak of strained dock lines. Eileen reminds herself that she chose this week for a reason. It is a moment of calm. There is nothing to panic about.

The sloop, now lightened of its cargo, and all her personal effects, is just an empty hull with a few electronics, some working—barely—and some long dead and taking up space. The thought of ripping out useless gadgets and wiring has never crossed her mind. The old AIS unit, the motorized steering mechanism which burned out on their trip up here, and a handful of other systems—broken gear is a natural part of her home. After some time, it never occurred to her at all that maybe they should be fixed. When moving from port to port, she and her mother always used the windvane when they needed some sort of autopilot. AIS? Sure, it would give them the identity of

nearby vessels, but it would also give other vessels their own information, and that is an unacceptable risk considering the state of the world.

Boys from the boatyard help her transport the totes up the gangplank and to a room above a nearby tavern, not far from the machine shop. In this room, Eileen will reside until the work on her boat is completed. The fixes are many—the most expensive to-do list and the longest she has ever planned to be out of the water. But the goal, as she discussed with the crew, is to prepare the boat for a long haul. She doesn't have a destination yet, but she senses a shift in the world coming, and this is her preparation for it.

On her list of things to accomplish this weekend is to re-organize her living space aboard the boat. She spends an hour showering and sorting clothes for the stay, and once she's settled, she sketches out plans of the possibilities. She has no budget, so there's no chance of investing in anything fancy—or even buying supplies—but she can salvage parts. After studying the schematics, she realizes her biggest problem right now is space—space she could free up if she got rid of some of the totes. The thought sends her inward, reflecting on her past.

Over the past fifteen years, the world settled into a new, terrible shape, and with her mother no longer with her, Eileen has been operating as if underwater. Something she fears will be permanent if she doesn't do something about it. Hiding from a brutal world and living in fear? *This isn't living*. She has the fleeting idea that maybe it's the totes themselves. *Why were we hauling these around? Why am I still? What's in these things? Why am I wondering about them now?* These totes have always been a natural part of the weight the boat carries—like a stabilizing ballast.

She kneels beside one at random, fingers hesitating over the brittle edge of the lid. This, too, is a kind of exposure. A retooling of how she thinks about the objects in her life. She exhales and pulls at the tape, surprised when the lid comes up, as if eager for air. Photo albums. An entire tote of them, plus loose unfiled photos stuffed in between the albums where any would fit. Some are clustered together with old rubber bands, and some loose photos clinging together because the emulsion on the prints have congealed and caused them to stick. Everything about the way it looks feels panicked, like there was no time to properly organize any of it.

Another tote is stuffed with some of Eileen's artwork from when she was a small child. This was way back—during the early years of the administration that would one-day betray them. She has no memory of producing any of it, but in contrast to the previous tote, the contents here are meticulously organized. Each piece includes a sticky note on the back detailing where and when they were created, and any further context if applicable.

Made at the Topsham library on x day.

Made at the Hallowell library on y date.

Made during an arts & crafts fair in Portland on Memorial Day weekend (age 2).

There are dozens of crayon-scribbled pages, each handled as though cataloged and archived by a professional curator.

Eileen's mother told her that when she was little, her dad had taken a break from his career to care for her, explaining that the cost of childcare—versus what he'd earn from working full time—cancelled each other out. Seeing this as

an opportunity to raise her directly (and maybe make her a better person for it), Mom worked, and Dad became her person at home. Their favorite thing to do during the week was go library hopping across Maine. At first, he took to driving to different libraries to attend story time, as there was always one on any given day. Eventually, they took to staying for art and craft lessons, or free-play with the other kids. Through this, Eileen would be educated, yes, but also distracted from what was taking root around them: a horrifying social collapse. Her Mom would later admit that Dad, in an act of personal resistance, was gauging which libraries needed donations—financial or in terms of its collection. He had a list of literature all the libraries in Maine should have without the need for an inter-library loan program (a program that was swiftly defunded when the totalitarian leadership took control).

Among his donations were the works of William Shirer and Hannah Arendt, and so many copies of *The Diary of Anne Frank* that there were always extra copies for young girls to keep as their own.

One of Eileen's earliest memories is sitting on the rug in Hallowell—the Hubbard Free Library. Often, it is mistaken for a church, and inside one might think it was at one time, and later converted into a library. But it was never a church—unless your religion is knowledge. Some of the locals insisted that the library was haunted by the ghost of a former librarian and caretaker, Annie Page. When the fascists came to burn the collection, they made it a point to pull all the historical newspapers, postcards, and non-fiction inventory out onto the intersection of Second and Central and light it up for the public to witness. As the pages burned, some claim to have heard the ghost of Annie screaming. As for the goons responsible: they had come down from Sidney—a small rural municipality sandwiched between the former capital of Maine, Augusta, and the City

of Waterville—once a college town, now a military checkpoint for travelers heading to Bangor.

Another tote.

Hard drives of data. It would be remarkable if any still fired up. She's not in the headspace to try so she pushes the tote off to the side and moves onto the next.

This one starts off rather inconsequentially. There are folders of medical files, namely hers, a U.S. birth certificate (if she were back home, she'd be legally obligated to destroy it), and her father's U.S. passport. They stopped issuing these a year before they left. This one's older—long expired, hole-punched clean through. He must have provided it to ensure she had something to connect her to him. Further down, a stack of diplomas belonging to both her parents: State University of New York, University of Maine at Augusta, and Bowdoin College. She hadn't even known—until now—that her parents held undergraduate degrees, let alone master's.

Then there is a black, zipper-sealed binder with a Five Star logo on the front. She opens it up. Inside, the contents are layered gently—old envelopes curled at the edges with various names and addresses—and cancellation ink across each stamped portion. Inside each, handfuls of stamps from across different eras, some cancelled, some never used. Brittle paper squares tucked safely away like seeds of a vanished world. A collection, chaotic and only somewhat organized, small and precise, of things that should not exist. Her breath catches in her throat. *Stamps. Postage stamps*. She frantically flips through the pages, pages that breathe dust and history, packed so tightly and haphazardly that she cannot stop them from falling out—each stamp a protest—trying to be free as much as inanimate objects can. *These*

are ghosts, she considers. *These stamps represent a world that was once free—now lost*.

The legend of the postal service in Eileen's old country was just that… an urban legend. A myth. There is nothing like it now. No one receives mail anymore. If you have debt—and you're unlucky enough to live stateside—they come for you without warning. Utilities? You do the math yourself, pay what you owe, and hope it's right. When the collectors make their rounds, payment is in cash—always. Want to wish someone a happy birthday? They'd better live next door. Long-distance anything is gone—no calls, no cousins across the country, no friends a few towns over. If they're not within walking distance, you have no way to reach them. It's all by design. They don't want anyone who remembers the constitutional republic to contact each other. After all, connection is the first step to organizing.

Eileen begins to hear her father, not as a faint thought, but as a real voice returning to her. "*A democracy is only as strong as the thing it insists on keeping*."

"There's value in the ordinary, Eileen," he would say.

"Without institutions like the postal service, libraries, fire and rescue, there is no society to keep us together."

He would go on to lament the mental health disorder that had taken root throughout the country in the years preceding the collapse.

"Everyone is under the delusion that a public service has to be profitable. But that's a flawed way to look at it. The very nature of a public service is to provide it regardless of whether it makes someone wealthy."

Eileen stares down at the fragile artifacts—

“We are one and the same,” she utters under her breath—talking to the stamps, as if they were sentient and could hear. “We are both refugees of a country lost. A history rewritten.”

How could the people have let it go like they did? How could they stop fighting?

The room above the tavern smells like warm beer and last week’s fish fry. Baskets from tavern meals are stacked by the waste bin—grease-stained wax paper curled at the edges; plastic ramekins of half- congealed tartar sauce. Eileen is existing atop cracked floorboards and beneath a slanted ceiling that creaks whenever the wind hits the roof at the right angle. For three days she’s been waiting—three days since she unloaded the totes, since they winched the hull out of the water and braced it in the gravel lot beside the marina’s back fence. Now the boat’s ribs are drying out like a carcass. Eileen feels similarly suspended, like being trapped on a tidal island after the tide has risen, with nothing to do but wait for the ebb.

The contents of the totes are everywhere. Not just the stamps—though those are still spread across the desk, pressed under a cracked plastic tote cover—but more documents, video media, music cassettes and CDs—movies—so many movies, all removed from their original packaging and organized into multiple leather-bound media books. Over 100 titles per book. It was as if her father was trying to save American culture before it was too late.

“*You weren’t there after 9/11*,” he wrote in a journal, as if addressing Eileen directly. “*Right-wing fanatics were destroying music CDs—albums they’d paid for with their*

own money—simply because they couldn't stand to hear their favorite musicians criticize the executive leadership."

"It was the first sign of a larger sociological psychosis taking root. *To stomp on a Dixie Chicks CD, Eileen! Goodness gracious!*"

Eileen finds the boat title buried in the chaos of papers and sets it on the nightstand, using it to block the dim red glow of the digital alarm clock. Lying on her side, she studies the document for a moment—an official Massachusetts boat title! The paper is faded, the watermark of the commonwealth barely visible, and her father's name in bureaucratic typeface—capital letters too neat for the man she remembers. Eventually, her eyes drift closed.

Eileen often falls asleep thinking about all the people left behind. How they just let it happen. *The theft of a country*. She recalls her neighbors standing in their yards, pretending the weekends under his administration were normal. They kept up with holidays and weekends, and on the surface things seemed okay. But it was all performance. No one waved quite as long. No one lingered on the porch or in public spaces anymore. She remembers her father talking about how the news wasn't fighting back as hard as he'd expected they would. How they used language to capitulate to the party leader's demands. It was as simple as retooling a headline to suggest that anyone under attack was somehow at fault. She remembers how furious Dad was with *The Times*, when the party leader tried to bully Greenland into surrendering its sovereignty—and the paper made it seem as though Greenland had done something to deserve it.

Eileen recalls sitting on their stoop, watching the trees sway in the breeze. Her father leaned into the doorway behind her, arms crossed, watching their neighbor, Bruns

Brown, as he unfurls a flag—brand new, spotless, and bearing a strange emblem below the stars and stripes: The president's new Unity Standard. Political loyalty disguised as patriotism. Eileen's stomach churns every time she thinks about this moment—and the symbol that was stitched across the red and white stripes. *The vandalism of Old Glory*.

But more than that, the indifference of the population really got to her father.

"This is when every citizen should be yelling from the rooftops," Dad said. "What is wrong with everyone?"

"They're scared," Mom explained—a tinge of fear in her own voice. "They're trying to insulate themselves, unaware that he's just taking it as permission to do what he pleases."

When confronted in groups, no one ever spoke up. Individually, it was different.

"We'll just be extra nice," the church ladies had said earlier that week.

Dad didn't respond at the time. He just nodded, shrugged, and turned away.

In the end, everyone had the Unity Standard, at least in appearance, just to avoid the question of why they didn't.

The wind along the water's edge is gentler than she expected—cool but not cutting, more like a hand pressing lightly against her shoulder. Eileen steps around a cluster of

washed-up kelp, the soft crunch of dried sand and broken shells beneath her boots. She needed out of the room. Out of the baskets, and the nauseating smell of powdered soup packets. Low tide reveals a glistening underworld of rocks and tide pools, and every so often, her reflection stares up at her from between the barnacles, half-there and flickering. With her hands in her coat pockets, shoulders hunched slightly, she notices her posture in the reflection.

She walks until the town thins behind her, until it's just the sea, the rocks, and a consistently calm breeze. The late afternoon sun has dipped just enough to cast everything in a brassy glow. Dad would call this "magic hour."

Somewhere in her mind, Dad is laughing.

"Times are tough!" he used to say, crouching beside her with wide eyes and a raised brow. *"Go goofy."*

And then he'd dance. Badly. Or cross his eyes. Or stick pencils up his nose at the library checkout desk until the librarian—usually an old friend—waved him off with a grin. He was *that* dad. The one who turned embarrassment into a survival skill. *Goofy Daddy*, she used to call him. "My Goofy Daddy!" she'd proclaim with pride, clutching his hand as they strolled into yet another library, another set of doors flung open like a cathedral.

That was before the island.

Mondays were for Topsham. Wednesdays, Hallowell. Fridays—Fridays were a surprise. Augusta, Brunswick, Portland. Or if the day was fine and the ferry was running, one of the island libraries. One day they drove several hours to Stonington, a village on Deer Isle. It was a haul but the quaint library felt like home to Dad, even though

he'd never been there before. He seemed to know everyone. And somehow, everyone knew Eileen.

"There's the Happy Baby!" they'd say, ruffling her hair, handing her free bookmarks or stickers, and sometimes letting her take home a toy.

After a while, her and Dad went less. The streets were harder to drive through, packed with people holding signs, faces half-covered. Once, they had to return home because tear gas billowed so thick onto I-295, that Dad turned the car onto the meridian and rerouted the way they came. They tried to take a rural route the following day, aiming for the Brunswick/Topsham bridge. That too was blocked with protestors and police. Eileen asked Dad why they couldn't go the next day instead. But the next day, there were concrete roadblocks. The day after, military patrols. IDs were checked. People questioned. Soon, you had to file transit itineraries to go anywhere beyond your initial municipality.

Her family escaped twice. The first, was to escape the mainland to an island off the coast. She remembers these moments as snapshots—the details filled in by her mother's recollections. She recalls the moonlight leaking through the curtains, the way her mother held her shoulders and looked her straight in the eyes.

"We're going to play a quiet game tonight, okay?" she said, pulling a hat down over Eileen's ears. "Quiet! Shhh."

They slipped out the back door, their footsteps muffled by damp pine needles. Down the hill, through trees that snagged at her sleeves, to a narrow road lit only by the interior glow of a waiting sedan. A woman sat behind the wheel. A friend, she knew then. Now—just a blur. Her name is lost, but the warmth of her smile remains.

“Where’s our car?” Eileen asked as Mom helped her into the backseat.

“We can’t use it anymore, sweetheart,” she whispered. “We need to move around without people knowing it’s us.”

The drive to Mere Point was silent except for the occasional crackle of gravel under the tires, and Mom talking softly from the front passenger seat. She remembers clinging to her mother’s sleeve when they got out, trying to piece together how everything had changed—seemingly overnight.

At the dock, a Carolina Skiff waited—low in the water that looked like black glass, its engine purring softly. Dad was standing at the console, and helped them aboard once they arrived. He gave a wave to the woman in the car, and as she drove off, he began to untie the line. They motored out, the night air slicing across her cheeks, salt and cold and promise. In the distance, Great Chebeague Island sat in the middle of the bay, darkened by a low-lying cloud.

As they road, her father spoke with incredible enunciation: “You are Eileen. You descend from one of the first European families to set foot in North America. You are from Brunswick, Maine. Your grandparents are buried in Riverside Cemetery. This is your identity. Do not forget it.”

He’d quiet down for a bit, and at some random point during the ride, he’d continue.

“Your ancestors fought for freedom and equality. Some died defying kings. Others, resisting tyrants. We’ve killed royal soldiers, slave owners, and Nazis. You come from heroes. Do not forget it.”

Once on the island, they would vanish—at least for a while. A friend had taken them in. Eileen didn't know it then, but it was where her father would stage their escape from the country.

Her father sold nearly everything that didn't matter, and tucked what did into storage. Always preparing. Always planning. She hadn't understood then how dangerous it all was. She only knew they were together, so she always felt safe.

The island was a haven. It was a community where people were trying their best to stay civilized and honest in a world where integrity got you listed. Certainly, everyone knew what was happening in the states, but in the cities and mainland towns, most kept their heads down and refused to talk about it. The islanders acknowledged and discussed it regularly. They knew that simply—being aware—would get them hunted by the party. Simultaneously, no one seemed worried about it. Eileen supposed it was because there was no regular law enforcement presence on the island, and ferry service had become scarce in those later years—once or twice a week at most—so it felt secluded, protected. Even if the feeling was illusory, people were more open to express themselves.

Her parents never said as much, but Eileen knew they were in hiding. She also knew when things were getting worse, mainly by way of other kids, and the handful of adults who made no effort to cover up their own anxieties as things worsened. There were too many whispers, emergency townhalls—too many glances out the rearview mirror—

Dad was listed before they even arrived—for his work with the local libraries. This never made her feel uneasy. She knew that he was intelligent, and could read people and

situations as if he were clairvoyant. As long as he was around, she never worried, not about herself or Mom, or even him. She knew he had a plan, and then a backup plan, and a backup of the backup. In his journal he once wrote, "*People often use the word redundant as a negative. I've always seen it as an asset. One of the most important ideas to embrace. Redundancy!*"

Life on the island was stable. Their schoolhouse still had students. On Saturdays, Eileen looked forward to afternoons at the island's one-room library. It was an extension of the travels she used to take with Dad. For a while, it felt as if the outside world hadn't touched the small island community. But then, one muggy August, her and Dad walked over to the building to find the front door chained shut. The assistant librarian, Kelsie, a volunteer who had grown up on Chebeague, was sitting on a nearby bench crying.

"They took all the books last night," she said. "They even emptied the Little Free Library."

Eileen gazed past her shoulder to see the wooden box emptied of its donated contents. She was confused because, in her understanding of the world, no one had a right to take other people's stuff.

"It's such a violation!" Kelsie murmured, mostly to herself.

"For 'national security.'" The phrase came out edged with irritation, like she was tired of hearing it.

Kelsie disappeared a week after bringing it up with the select committee.

Then there was Mrs. McCallister. She'd served as minister at the community parish for the better part of a decade when they broke from the Methodist Church and chose to become all-accepting and non-denominational. Rumor had it she'd saved some of the library's banned books before the party came for the whole collection, hiding them somewhere on the island—maybe in one of the old cottages left empty when New York and Massachusetts families stopped spending summers there.

No one came for Mrs. McCallister for a while. She might have thought she was safe. Eventually they did—weeks later—and her fellow church ladies were no doubt smiling as they took her—still agreeing to 'just be nice'.

Now, standing alone on the rocky shoreline of a foreign country, with her toes at the edge of the tide and no certain way forward, Eileen finally sees it clearly: Even in their silence, her parents were resisting. Every book. Every library visit. Every goofy dance in a world on fire—was a protest against the cruelty. When cruelty is the point, being goofy was the ultimate resistance.

The escape didn't come with fanfare, or even a proper goodbye to the islanders that protected her and her parents. She sensed something was coming weeks before. The way the neighbors started looking at her and her family—furtive glances, performed niceties, and some drama—likely from those who disagreed with what Dad had been planning. She recalls a shouting match late one evening—a woman at their door, her voice sharp, her words harsh.

"You're going to bring them down on all of us!"

She cannot remember what her mother said back—just the heat of it. The slamming of the door. The fury in her mother's pacing. When Dad returned and heard about the incident, "I thought she was one of us," he said. "I truly thought she was smarter than this."

Then came the news. Peaks Island, raided. Families split. People arrested or vanished. The words "liberal dissidents" echoing through every static-choked broadcast.

The town of Long Island, their neighbors. When local businesses refused to display the Unity Standard, someone torched the entire down front area—every building burned to cinders.

The ferry system was also targeted. To maintain eligibility for crucial federal transportation subsidies, the longstanding board of the Casco Bay Island Transit District was quietly dissolved and supplanted by a newly formed body known as the Friends of the Party. Membership was limited to those who had publicly pledged loyalty to the administration's platform, and their first acts were to enact a series of policies that curtailed free travel between the islands. What had once been a public service dedicated to connectivity and community was reshaped into a mechanism of oversight and control, with every departure recorded, every arrival scrutinized, and movement no longer considered a right but a privilege to be granted—or revoked.

After all these incidents, her father would go to work in the evenings. She's not sure what he did, but she also realized sometime later that work was just a cover. He was a resistor, and his form of resistance was absolutely a crime. He'd be gone at sundown, back by dawn, smelling like salt and diesel, wind-chapped and grim. He never offered answers, and Mom never asked. Eileen learned not

to ask, and to take every moment they had together as a gift.

They'd lived on Great Chebeague for a solid year and some weeks. Then came the final night.

On a mid-spring morning, around 2AM, Mom woke Eileen again, and told her to put on multiple layers of clothes, and her winter boots.

"Where are my sneakers?"

"Your father has them."

"Why does Dad have my sneakers?"

"He has all your belongings."

As she dressed, she noticed a lot of items missing from her bedroom. Not everything, but a lot. In the moment, she was too weary to take a mental inventory. Once dressed, Mom took Eileen's hand and said they were going for a walk.

Outside, they were met by a familiar face. That same islander—the one who'd argued with her mother—was the one who led the way. There didn't seem to be anymore animosity between the two. There was no shouting, no anger, only a sense of urgency. The streetlights weren't on. Eileen had never seen that before. Someone likely arranged it for their sake. In the dark—made heavier by the overcast sky and the new moon—the three crossed the island on foot, skirting North Road and slipping into the woods whenever they heard a car or saw headlights flicker through the trees. They trekked a mile and a half to Lover's Lane, crossed to South Road, and followed a dirt track that led them down to the south shore.

“Where are we going?” Eileen asked.

“Shh… we’re going to the Jenks!” her mother would come back with a heightened whisper.

“But… this is the way to Deer Point.”

“We need to walk along the shore, my dear,” the woman said. “Please, stay quiet!”

At the edge of the beach, Eileen spotted him—her father—rowing in from a moored forty-foot sloop. The rowboat looked comically small beneath him. At first, the sloop seemed modest, unremarkable. But as she squinted, studying its lines and the way it bobbed with the tide—like a horse nodding as it walks—she sensed its quiet power. As he approached, her father smiled in the way he did when he was holding back the fullness of what he wanted to say.

He threw a line to the woman, and she pulled the boat onto the beach so Eileen and her mother could board without getting their feet wet.

“Is everything there?” Mom asked.

“We’re good to go,” Dad said, turning his gaze to the woman who was holding the line. “Thank you.”

“Your family is a real hit with the islanders. We’re sure going to miss all of you.”

“Are we leaving?” Eileen blurted out behind tears. “I don’t want to leave!”

“We have to,” Mom said. “We’re marked.”

Trying to keep as quiet as possible, they climbed into the rowboat, every creak echoing across the cove—screaming, *Look here! Look what they're up to!* Dad directed every move they made, and they complied without comment. Eventually, the woman pushed them off and returned to the night as Dad started rowing them out to the mooring. During this time, her father kept staring at her. She didn't understand it, and was somewhat annoyed that her tears didn't change his mind at all.

The sloop seemed to swell, growing larger until it filled her view—like a shadowy sentinel waiting for its moment. By the time they arrived, she couldn't believe how big it was. This, in addition to the fact that another, little motorboat, was sharing the mooring, gave the presence of a larger whole.

"I thought it was tiny," she whispered.

Dad looked over his shoulder, adjusting their angle.

"Forty feet," he said, then after a pause, added: "Don't be fooled. She's spacious. People live in these things."

She remembers the way he said it—like he was trying to convince her that it is a normality. As normal as a house or apartment. It seems, in retrospect, he needed her to believe that this wasn't just an escape, but a beginning.

As they approached the sloop, the current shifted them to a head-on approach to the stern, at which point she saw the name for the first time: GOOFY.

"You like it, Eileen?" Dad asked, keeping his voice low.

"I love it—Goofy Girl!" she said in a heightened whisper.

“That’s right. You’re my Goofy Girl. And who am I?”

“Goofy Daddy.”

“And don’t you ever forget it. Goofy. It’s a badge of honor.”

They climbed aboard, and while Eileen looked out at the island, Mom and Dad went about rigging for the trip. Dad checked the lines, the sails, and the water supply. Mom confirmed that the contents of their storage unit had been transferred to the boat. Together they pulled the rowboat aboard, flipped it over onto the deck, and tied down the oars. Finally, Dad pulled from an attaché case a pouch of charts and a tin box with identification papers.

“If Canada doesn’t take you, go farther. Ireland. France. Belgium. Just keep going. Don’t stop until you’re somewhere that makes sense again.”

Mom nodded. She didn’t cry. She knew not to, for Eileen’s sake. He kissed his wife one last time, and then he crouched to Eileen’s level, his face older than she remembered it being just a week before.

“Goofy Girl,” he whispered, then kissed her forehead.

Dad jumped into the nearby motorboat and started the engine. The same Carolina Skiff that had brought them to the island. With practiced calm, he sped off, lights on, engine screaming. Any attention on the water would be directed at him. She recognized what he was doing: Decoy. Bait. Somewhere in the dark, the radar had shown an unknown vessel without an AIS signal going at an ungodly speed in the dark of the night—coast guard, police, she never knew which, but they were the only vessels that were legally allowed to operate without tracking hardware.

They'd likely have deployed all their maritime units to pursue him, and he would've made sure they were drawn as far from the sloop as possible.

Eileen recalls the way her mother's hands shook as she raised the sails, and the sound of the wind catching. She was amazed at the speed which they pushed their way out of the bay—and how quiet it was.

It took all night to get to international waters. They didn't see one vessel during the entirety of the trip, and this is a result of her father's impeccable planning. He knew when it would be safe to go.

Eileen glances out past the mouth of the harbor. Somewhere out there, her father disappeared into the night. Somewhere out there, he continued his story, and she hers. She thinks about that—the physical deviation of stories that previously ran parallel—boats splitting paths in the night, and suddenly, they're each alone in a hostile world. She presses her thumb to her palm and closes her fingers around it, creating a sense of peace. Soon, she switches hands and repeats the act.

She can still feel the tension in the lines when the wind shifted somewhere off the Flemish Caps—the way the boat seemed to nearly capsize from the incredible chop and gale force winds. She can still hear his voice: *People live in these things,* or overhearing Dad tell Mom that a friendly boat name, like the one he'd chosen, could work in their favor, and maybe draw sympathy from any would-be authorities.

"Individual soldiers are still human," he said.

Now, years later, after adapting to the echoes of her parents' choices, her fingers numbing in the brisk night

breeze. *He couldn't stop staring at me*, Eileen realized. *On that final row over. He was taking a picture. A mental picture. He knew we wouldn't see each other again*.

Eileen and Mom never talked much about Dad. They'd assumed he'd continued with the resistance for a while, and either had to disappear on his own, or was killed. It was difficult to get information out of America after that. They never really tried.

Eileen would continue studying, more or less as a home-school student, taking lessons from her mother, and developing a taste for literature. She'd come to appreciate the classics, especially books often referred to as "Great American Novels." She created a routine of annotating and cataloging her thoughts on each title as she acquired them, trying to learn what made them not only great, but great as it concerns America.

In lieu of Home Economics, she'd learn to cook on the boat. By the time she was a teenager, she was so skilled with a knife that cleaning fish became her primary chore. Instead of Phys-Ed, she became an expert sailor, mostly teaching herself through trial and error. She didn't really learn the jargon, because only basic instructions were provided to them when they departed.

Regardless, she picked up nearly all of it over the years. She learned the feel of the sailcloth under her hands, the way the wind moved when it shifted just off the bow. She taught herself to sail by starlight whenever her mother would go down for the night, and she'd quietly correct the heading before the morning sun came up. She could swim too—better than most. When she was 19, she once held her

breath for eight minutes during a free-dive. When she came up and learned how long she'd been under, all she could think was that her father would be proud.

Eileen returns to the room. It has been seven days now, maybe eight. She's lost track. The air is stale. It happens when a place is sealed up for winter with plastic and duct tape. No draft means no air flow. She rips away the plastic and opens a window. A chilly breeze off the harbor floods the room, causing many of the papers she'd placed about to blow onto the floor. She manages to catch the boat title before it is blown into a nearby wastebasket. Falling into a cross-legged position on the floor, she begins to slowly repack the totes, methodically folding her own baby clothes, resealing small boxes of old media, photo negatives, video cassette tapes, and proceeding to recheck the inventory of water filters, first-aid supplies, and spare batteries.

At the bottom of the last tote, beneath a rolled-up rain slicker and her father's old binoculars, something wedged against the corner catches her attention. She tugs it loose—a soft, cloth-bound notebook she'd missed before. She flips it open. *His* handwriting. Dad. *Goofy Daddy*, with his doctor-like scribble struggling to stay within the narrow college-ruled lines.

The first page is a list of names. Some she knows instantly—librarians from all over Maine, each of them allies of her father's mission: Paige, Beverly, Nancy, Caroline, Becky, Annie—people who refused to purge their shelves when the mandates came down. People who kept the banned books behind false walls, under floorboards, in barns, basements, and boats. The notebook confirms a

legend: some collections were hidden in the engine rooms of the DOT's Midcoast ferry fleet—all Dad's doing. There are sketches, too—faces drawn in number two pencil, some with only partial names: "Gwen, Peaks Island," "John M., Topsham," "H.S. (driver)." She pauses on this one. H.S.—the driver who'd picked them up the night of their escape to Chebeague. A woman. She remembers now. She can picture the back of her head with a single braid tucked beneath a knit cap.

Why had she forgotten about her braid?

She turns another page. Taped between the sheets are more stamps. Dozens of them. These are strictly American stamps, with American themes, and American people. Musicians like Elvis, Ethel Merman, and Buddy Holly. Legends of the West: Bill Pickett, Jim Bridger, and Annie Oakley. Cultural icons: Marilyn Monroe, and a stamp with a cherub on it that simply reads, LOVE.

Back then, the country seemed to stand for respect and compassion between people.

She pulls the original stamp collection off the end of the bed and unzips the folio. She's now working out that her father had a purpose. Then it hits her—

Her father had once joked about "resistance postage" to which her mother would shake her head. She never understood it. But now, Eileen is beginning to see his vision.

If only people could remember.

The stamps could help them.

If they saw them, touched them, held them in their hands—not all of them—just one. One stamp left on a

telephone pole. On a ferry seat. A single stamp folded into a book that hasn't been banned yet. They see a face, a name, a scenic—

—and they'll remember. They'll wonder. They'll inquire.

Eileen's breath catches in her throat.

These aren't just stamps. They're sparks.

Her phone rings.

She jumps, then scrambles to answer.

"Hey, this is Miles at the boatyard."

Eileen exhales slowly. "Hey, Miles."

"She's ready. The hull's in really great condition, actually—good bones. We added a new experimental antifouling coat, hoping it'll deter barnacle growth a little longer than the standard stuff. Might buy you some extra time between haul-outs. We had to replace the cathode."

"That's all great."

"Aye, we also had to replace the fuel pump. It was on its last leg—was surprised you even made it in when you did. One more thing: your jib halyard's looking rough. We'd recommend picking up new lines for that and maybe the mainsheet too, if you can swing it. Launch is tomorrow morning, eleven sharp."

Back at the boatyard, Eileen stands with her totes and other belongings lined up at the top of the gangplank. She nervously watches as the sloop named GOOFY, suspended with thick canvas slings beneath a hulking steel cradle on wheels, inches towards the water. The contraption looks part farm implement, part torture device, all rust and hydraulics, and a screaming diesel engine that hauls it forward in slow, jerky spurts—the timbers of the hull creaking as it sways.

The sloop looks almost pitiful like this. *Pitiful and helpless*. Eileen's hands stay clasped at her stomach; she can't shake the thought of the hull slipping, the mast catching on overhead lines, or the keel striking the ramp too soon. She side-steps as it moves, keeping time with it, inching her way to the gangplank. Once the stern touches the water, she descends down to the dock. The decking creaks beneath her boots as she approaches the edge, moving with the progress of the launch. The breeze lashes her hair across her cheek, but she doesn't bother brushing it away. All her focus is on the draft line, and the rising water. Soon the hull settles, and the vessel is once again afloat. Once again, majestic. Some of the boatyard boys kick off their boots and head straight into the chilly water, using their own muscles to maneuver the sloop over to the dock. They spin her to have the bow facing towards the entrance to the harbor, and as the stern comes into clear view, the name on it appears bolder than before: GOOFY. *Glorious Goofy*!

"Fun name for a boat" one of the boys says.

"My dad named it," Eileen says. "He used to call me Goofy Girl. I used to call him Goofy Daddy. Some people use goofy as a pejorative, like… oh that's just some goofy nonsense, or whatever. But Dad saw it as a badge of honor."

“I agree with him. Sounds like a cool dude.”

“He was.”

With the boys holding the sloop tight to the dock, Eileen climbs aboard. And crouches down to check the mooring line, her fingers steady as she pulls it.

“Still with me, Goofy Girl,” she whispers—imagining her father’s mellow tone.

She moves through the checklist—testing the lines for fray and tension, running her hand along the jib sheet, then the halyard. A flick of the wrist tests the winch; it clicks and spins clean. The sails, neatly flaked, are still creased from storage but dry and serviceable. She’ll stretch them on the water.

Below deck, she lifts the engine cover. It’s clean—new clamps on the coolant hoses, a replaced belt, everything bolted tight and smelling faintly of fresh oil and varnish.

Then comes the reloading.

One by one, the totes are returned to the bilge—stacked by weight, wedged in and snug with rags and folded towels. She knows exactly where each one lives. Dry goods. Tools. Books. Spare parts. Maps and rations. But one tote—*the* tote—she sets aside until last. The one with the stamp collection. She does not return it to its original place with the others, but instead tucks it beneath her bed. She can hardly believe it—she’s actually considering something extraordinary: to follow in her father’s footsteps. To save who she can. To find her people, and maybe, just maybe, help them finally understand what they’ve lost—and how to fight to get it all back.

She could go wing-on-wing, even install the spinnaker, and full-power all the way to Casco Bay, shift into a broad reach at the sound, and anchor in a small cove off the backside of one of the outer islands. Jewell, perhaps. She'll row in a dingy from island to island if she has to. *It would only take a day or two*, she assumes at first. If she only uses the wind, she might even be able to slip in unnoticed in the middle of the night. Two or three nights from now, sure. She maps out a viable route: Depart and sail south and west through St. Peter's Canal… or the Strait of Canso. Make sure to depart with a favorable tide as there are strong tidal currents in the strait. It's also narrow and often windy—tricky for a solo sailor. Without Mom to help with the rigging, it's a bigger decision than it lets on. Follow the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia. Hug the shore. This makes sense since the coast is rugged with fog, ledges, and Halifax is a solid place to rest and take on supplies—or reassess if she's being too bold. Coastal anchorage when necessary. Avoid wandering into international waters—America has patrols out there. Sometimes she sees them, distant on the horizon. Sail in short hops. It's a long and exposed coast. Eileen might wait out bad weather behind Cape Sable Island. The final push brings her into the Bay of Fundy's outer edge. Cross the Gulf of Maine all the way to Boothbay. Monitor for maritime authorities and if it feels viable, continue on until she reaches Bailey Island. There are many islands and harbors where she can drop anchor and row in but this last leg is the riskiest—busy shipping which means higher probability of surveillance patrols. *And who the hell knows what tech they have now*? *Who knows how much more vicious they've become?* It's hard to guess because no information leaves the states anymore. Fog is unpredictable in the Gulf of Maine. *Damn*, she realizes, *this is at least a week's worth of sailing*, and just the idea that she's thinking about it gives her anxiety.

But, for the first time in a long time, she's excited. Inspired. *Imagine*: people living under the thumb of tyranny for many years waking up to reminders of the world they lost. Imagine the power of such a morning, when America snaps out of it. Could this be the kick-in-the-ass that's needed to revive the resistance her father desired from them?

She exhales, feeling the slap of the hull as she steers into the chop of the sound. The choice is hers: Let go, or to come about. The wind is shifting, but the horizon is inviting. The weight of history rests in her bearings.

Eric Norcross
Chebeague Island

Linda Prybylo
Peaks Island

Don’t Cross Me

Life is funny
Mine is in boxes
Life in transition
is far less transitory
than I would like

I am leaving

It seems that bridges are where all my thoughts emerge
converge

A series
of Bridges

I am leaving

Highway Bridges
Big Bridges
Long Bridges
Stones Bridges
New Suspended Bridges
Turn of the century one-way Bridges
Wooden land low Bridges
Free Bridges
Bridges with tolls
Eight miles long Bridges
Orange-red Bridges
Unnoticed Bridges
Straight bridges
Four lines Bridges
Closed Bridges
Rotten Bridges
Temporary Bridges
Foggy Bridges
Nameless Bridges

Memorial Bridges
Bridges Between two states
Bridges Between islands
Bridges without water
Forgotten Bridges
Low speed Bridges

To feel these
not as connector
not as a link between places
separated
By a ravine
by some cascading water
by a gaping hole

To experience Bridges as places with
a geography
a topography
a sonography

To experience its human-dom
over nature
over space
standing there
in its pompous magnificence
trying to conquer worlds into one
trying to mend the brokenness it creates
for convenience

To experience its absence
The unfolding of a desire
an unbridged island

with no U-turn

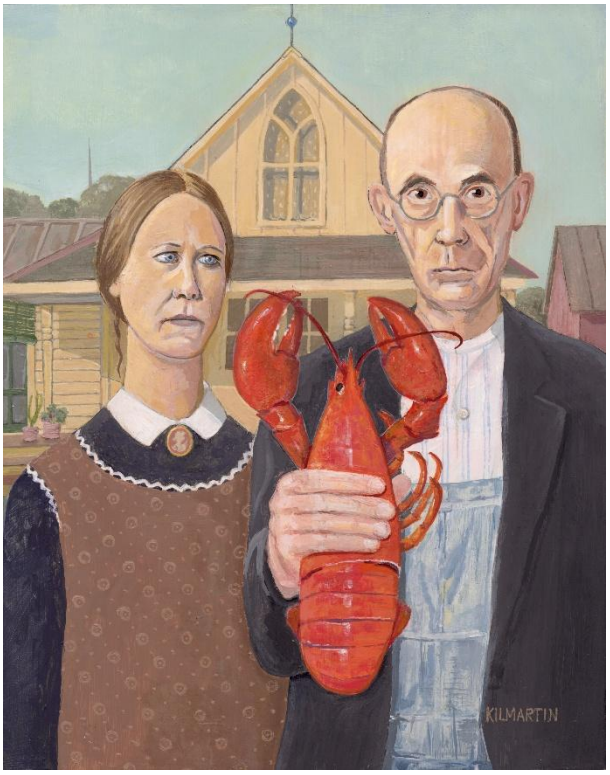
it's an act of faith
it's a way back

it's a way over
it's a way through

I am leaving

without crossing.

Manon Barthelemy
Islesboro



Tom Kilmartin
Peaks Island

The Fog

came down and over the island.
It came on Tuesday mornings and Friday nights and Sunday at noon. The fog came when all the lights were on, and even when the power was out. It hugged the long legs of the ferry wharf, choked up along the cow fields, and drowned the beach in blinding cotton. The fog came in summer and deafened the air until all that could be heard was the rushing of the harbor.
The fog came in fall, even on nights the moon had powdered her face. It came in a silent hour when all the good women were singing hymns. It leaned against the muddy pickup trucks, pried street signs from telephone poles, and turned grassy pastures into cliffs.
In winter, the fog came hopelessly, a violent friend welcomed up to the hearth. When even the great pines had bent their spines back towards the land, the fog came as a cover for the crashing sea.
When the deep cold burned through the soles of our boots, the fog came like a black hole and held the island in its gullet. The fog came in spring as a cotton cloud, a slate wiped clean and pure. It scrubbed the salt from the thickets of morning glories.
It mended maple fences and loosened cedar shakers.
It came as a shoulder for the snap peas to lean on,
and a gentle shade for the slipping minnows.
Sometimes the fog came with rain and rescued the earth from watery bullets.
Sometimes the fog came as a god with no hands.
Sometimes it came as a lullaby cradling lamplight.

Lydia Russell
Matinicus Island

Cindy Thomas
Islesford

rosa rugosa

some are already starting to shrivel
skins wrinkling in the salt air sun
but most have just reached the point of turning deep red
almost purple
they are ready

on a warm fall day they wait by the roadside
mixing in with the smell of fallen apples starting to rot
and the mist off the ocean

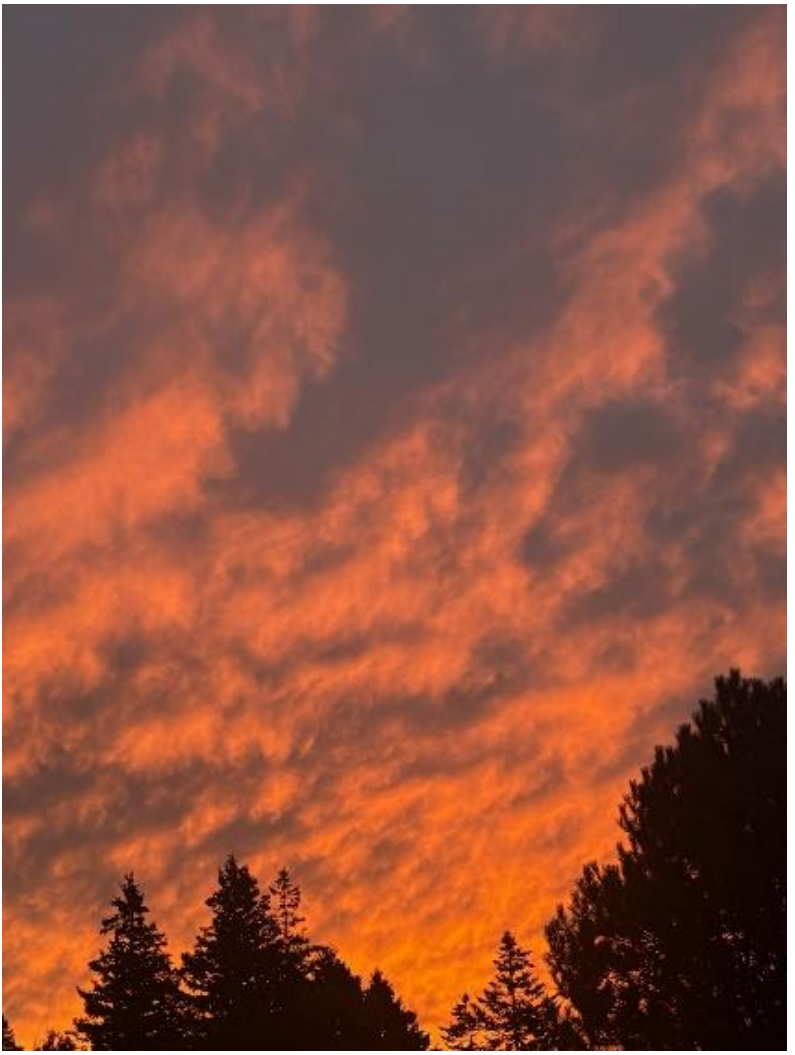
the fragrance of a few remaining rose petals that frame the fruit
beckoning the walker
and the birds
and the bees

for them it could be food for winter ahead
for the walker a small moment of delight
bites of fruit taken on a late september day
summer to fall

fall to winter
a brief pause in a walk through a year
on one of the last few days of warm blue-sky sun

Irv Williams
Peaks Island

Nancy Calvert
Isle au Haut



Lily Ellison
Swan’s Island

The Home

I stacked blocks and dreamed
of building houses.
I saw people in there
under my soaring rooflines
and graceful landings.

Patches of window light
danced in my homes,
a daylong movement
from an annual symphony.
My door jambs mark time
in height across generations.
A young bride was carried
across my threshold. Later, it was
happily tramped
by teenagers roaring out to play.

My homes have heard
the midnight bicker
of young couples
intently bargaining.
Who shall pad my hallway
and feed that unreasonable,
inconsolable baby in my
well-proportioned bedroom,
indifferent to my lovely
southeast exposure.

My homes have told me
they love the feel
of small bare feet slapping
across their smooth hardwood floors.
They love the sound
of unrestrained laughter
echoing off their walls.

My garages have seen
burnt fingers, bashed knuckles,
and hammers hitting
the wrong nail.
My walls have blanched
from linen to pale ivory
from the effluent profanity
that follows so very soon.

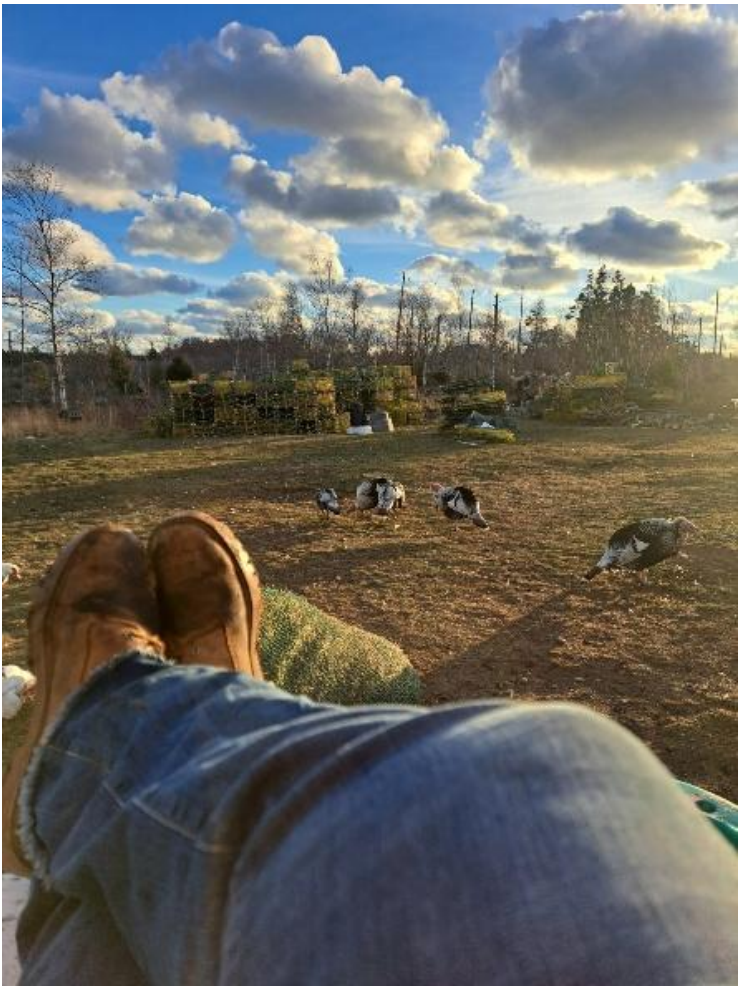
My basements are concrete,
the sturdiest container
for the teenager.
It is a launchpad, where,
with their most combustible
temperament, they must hie
lest their world weary,
surly scorn of everything
scorch the entire household.
The countdown to their launch
has begun. My walls
can take the heat.

My attics are full-
a bassinet, a stroller, high chair,
bunk beds and scooters
and a tiny tricycle.
They once held the children.
Now they hold memories
too precious to discard.

My houses will bear
the bitterest snowstorm,
they will hunch

against the howling gales,
for they are the shelter,
they are the haven,
they are the home.

Weston Parker
Swan's Island



Samantha J. Philbrook
Matinicus Island

First Snowstorm of Winter

low, pearlescent light of a snowy day,
i recognize promise in its soft glow,
blurring,
stretching easy
across the path and up to the door,
where swirling flakes already obscure the scarred handle.

the woods are trunks retreating...beckoning.

i pull the wool cap, veteran of long winters,
close and low across my brow,
and lift the glove with the gashed thumb,
red thread dangling giving pause
before my fingers burrow into its tunnels,
and hurriedly i press feet into boots rippled at the ankles,
still mud-spattered
from last spring's swollen paths.
i shrug on the winter coat of vast pockets,
and step to the door,
and wonder at the face remade in the mirror.

Jacqueline Gryphon
Peaks Island

What I Like About Isle au Haut

I love fishing,
School is fun, too.
We go on awesome field trips!
Kipp is great, she always picks out perfect books.
I love to explore, and Isle au a Haut is great for that!

Elias Saucier
Isle au Haut

Terry Wood
Matinicus

Life On An Island

Living on an island.
It is so, so great and I love it so much.
There's hiking, swimming, skating and sledding.
I hike patiently, so patiently
among the trees.
In the sky
snowy owls are flying by.

Milo Way
Monhegan

Frederick Appell
Great Cranberry Island

Sophie McMahan
Matinicus

Perfectly Imperfect

The sewing circle of my past floats like an illusion through clouded vision. We are generations of women: newlyweds, single mothers, immigrants and grandmothers, young and old. We sew our differences aside. The fabric of life twists and alters, ending in a display of fitted suits and custom wedding dresses. This is how we work—women guiding women through transitions, customs and rituals. Pins and needles, full-length mirrors. Our needles move over, under and through. We tell our stories through the hands of sewing. We find each other in vulnerability, and in doing so we learn of our own strength. For years I sat with piles of brokenness and found ways to repair it all. Darn, knit, mend. The sure-footedness of my youth carried me on wings of hope with the knowledge and belief that anything could be fixed. I am older now and life has grown exponentially in all directions. Anticipating my mother's imminent death reveals to me that some things cannot be fixed; life is best spent mending hearts.

•••

My mother has not been my mother for five years now. Her progressive form of dementia ripped her abruptly from me, during the early years of mothering. This became the unraveling of a favorite sweater, caught on a nail, gone before I could say goodbye. Her illness has consumed her. It defines her, and therefore defines me as well. She and I, we are a different sort of mother and daughter now. We are kindred spirits tied by an invisible string, meeting somewhere not in this world but in the air and space of sleep. We meet briefly in dreams before floating away from each other once again. Five years feels like forever, and peace comes slowly through the many faces of grief. At times I am stumbling and angry, weeping and broken, occasionally indifferent. Healing is marked by seasons:

grief has an abrupt beginning and no clear end. Her unraveling mind helps me greet grace, because there's nothing left to do but find peace while I watch my mother slowly die.

Back before the diagnosis, before the emotional disconnect that resulted from a deteriorating frontal lobe, before her seizures and social awkwardness, before the endless lines of doctors that led us to the office of an unsmiling neurologist, before MRIs and EEGs and cognitive impairment tests, before adult diapers, walkers and wheelchairs, before Picks Disease—there was Mom.

When I was a young girl without sisters of my own, my mother's friendships taught me about the strength and resiliency of women. Thirty years later, her terminal illness teaches me even more about the human spirit. Life provides no answers. My mother has no sisters of her own either, so when news spread of the diagnosis, her lifelong friends circled around me to become my honorary aunties. I embraced the female power of her chosen collective and it continues to carry me, all these years later. It's through the stages of my mother's dementia that I see the peeling of life's layers and I accept the reality of how families cope with loss. I witness the friendships that remain and the love that rises.

When mothers forget how to mother, daughters are reluctant to step into their place. The early years of Mom's terminal illness fractured us. This raw truth is now a memory attached to me in my own detachment. Her memory drifts like balloons tied to a child's wrist. That space between here and there is dappled in sunlight. It is one part heavy, one part light.

Put a family in crisis and you'll discover coping mechanisms. They pop up like mushrooms after a rain.

Laughter becomes medicine. Anger and bitterness flood the house. Tears become healing reserves of sanity. Put a family in crisis and you'll feel the floor shift and creak as everyone takes a step to the left, filling new shoes, bridging the gaps, taking on new roles. We are the brave ones; with swollen puffy eyes, we bear witness to each other. As we fade and reassemble (stubbornly at first) we provide each other space to grieve in our own strange ways. We are a different family now without Mom as matriarch.

In my heart there lays hidden a wail of melancholic verse sung with head thrown back. It's the stifled sob cried softly into deep pillows while the dark swallows me up from the outside in. Somewhere deep down there's an ache and a longing for something long lost. I simultaneously slide forward and backwards. Skating along the timeline that fluctuates between mother and daughter, adult and child.

What we do not know is the beginning. How and when she first sensed her mind had gone awry. What we do not know is the end. How and when the breath will leave her body and she will at once be free. All we know is here and now. Her humming, her vacant stares, her mouth agape filled with a void of words that will never cross her lips again.

Through the years of her illness, I have found beauty in the breakdown. There are surprising gifts. New relationships have the opportunity to bloom. Father and daughter heal, mend and make peace in her absence. Small talk grows bigger with the severity of our situation. Our conversations turn business-like without warning. My father addresses health concerns, bills, receipts and the truth that she has outlived her long-term health insurance. He asks me a favor and I accept, knowing it will be near impossible for me to accomplish. The truth is that I don't

want to write my mother's obituary. I'm cursed with her superstitions. Perhaps I fear that when it's finished, her spirit will cut free from her body and she'll fly away from us for good. In my grieving mind, if I don't write her obituary, she can't die.

Strangely, nighttime has a cloak of comfort. The truth is that reality happens in the middle of the day. Three o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon. Yes, right now… the phone is ringing. I answer it expecting the worst, fearing that every call might be the one that brings me to my knees.

My mother is happily unaware and has not been lucid for years. She has required twenty-four-hour nursing home care since 2010. My father became the caregiver during the first year of her illness, when she was still able to live at home. Now he lives alone with forty-eight years of marriage. So, on the phone now—it's my father's voice in a panic that I hear. With one ear pressed to the phone I realize I am now a grown-up. He begins each conversation with "Your mother is fine." Because we both know that her death is always hovering in our minds. But his voice cracks, and there's a silent sob that hangs between us causing my eyes to well with tears. In this moment he is unsure, unsteady and unable to go it alone.

Through the years of my mother's decline, my father has become beautifully human to me. It's painful for men of his generation to reveal their humanness, brokenness or vulnerability. I'm thankful to be on the other end of his phone. I'm glad we have each other. After he clears his throat, he's asking questions and I'm providing the answers that I've grown to hate: we are in the final-stage of dementia and there's nothing pretty about it. The obsessive-compulsive behavior is behind us now. She is mute. There won't be any more anger or broken bones now, because she has declined so rapidly. Her wheelchair is permanent. She

will spend more and more of her time sleeping, and eventually her body will forget how to swallow. “Keep a list of emergency contacts in your wallet, Dad, and call me anytime you need.”

I say things like, “When you’re ninety-seven years old…” to remind him that he’s going to get through this. “Dad, when you’re ninety-seven, I’ll be a sixty-year-old woman. You’ll still be tinkering with your lamps! I’ll have to come over and find all the parts you misplaced.” He laughs but he doesn’t believe me, even though longevity runs in his family. I say things like this to remind us both that we will get through this, as unbelievable as it seems now. While walking so close to the edge of death, it’s hard for him to think of being alone for another twenty years after my mom passes away. So, we’re left drifting, together yet separate. Bobbling in the hot sun as waves go up and down, making us queasy. There are no words other than sad and heart wrenching ones. Nothing left to share but sorrow and love.

•••

I am wrapped in hand-sewn quilts for protection, for this is how I get through the winter of my grief. A sewing circle of past and present. I am surrounded not only by intricate patterns, personalities of creative women and the precision of their hand stitches, but I am embraced by their stories, the power of their words, the strength of memory and how they lived through healthier times. These stories and quilts are what strengthen me with reminders that human imperfection is actually quite beautiful. In this life, we are all perfectly imperfect.

I pick up a needle and thread. I sew buttons, I patch jeans, I make tidy repairs for the things in my life that allow for mending. I cradle the phone on my shoulder and with a red thread between us, I speak to my mother’s

hospice nurse, 670 miles away. “Comfort and dignity,” she tells me. It’s what the life of my beautiful mother has come to. I repeat it like a mantra, comfort and dignity; like a final goodbye that hangs in the distance. My needle passes over, under and through. Sewing my life with bits of her thread until her story becomes my own.

Meredith Winn
Peaks Island

Dorian Edwin
Matinicus

Last Cowboys

1.
Lobstermen litter the North Atlantic with traps
crazy men clinging
to the last bite of freedom
they
still think
they can be independent
owners and operators on open waters
working in unison
with an indigenous sea
feeding the ocean
taking only what it gives
primitive trapping
what?
not working for a corporation!

2.
a dominant gull
perched on the bow bit
gallant
majestic
flaunting danger with
his bright eyes
his stark beak
his awareness
unafraid as the spray flies cold
induced by the judgmental chops

the lobsterman lets him ride up front
leading the way
as the mountainous swells
let his boat
ride its back
for today at least
but tomorrow

maybe not
could this be his last day in the saddle?

Jack Merrill
Islesford

Kristy McKibben
Matinicus Island

island storm, early morning

i watch the trees dance
wildly
outside the window,
as the storm rages on,
they are rooted firmly,
toughened from years
of harsh conditions,
more hearty than their inshore relatives,
which could also be said
of these island inhabitants
who have learned
crucial tactics of survival
out here

i, too, am learning—
little things like
how to run my wood stove
most efficiently,
just how many
canned fruits and vegetables
to stock in the pantry
for winter,
and the most sheltered places
to get out for a walk
on blustery days
like this

also bigger things
such as how to let go
of disappointment
when the boat doesn't run,
and long-awaited plans
to visit family
quickly dissipate
how to lean into

this solitude
and use it
for growth
instead of mere shelter-
it can be easy
to hunker down and wait
when you are alone
and i am learning
how to reach out
and open the door
to all manner
of opportunities,
for you never know
just what
will come
of them

now i sit by the fire
and listen
to what the wind says
as she
rattles the windows,
and shakes the walls,
i lean in close
and am not afraid
of the words
she whispers
for i know we are
meant to sway,
as we discover
our own truth

Katherine Radune
Monhegan

I Wouldn't Be Typing This *Word*

I love islands. I love being surrounded by water. I love that the sun rises on one side and sets on the other. I love the sound of the waves and sitting with a coffee in the morning, watching the tide go out or come in. I love searching for beautiful rocks and looking among the flotsam for treasures. I love having to get on a ferry to get there and needing one to leave. I love the smallness of island life, the community of it, the reliance of people upon each other for what they need. I love not locking the house or the car.

Every single time I've been to an island, I've wanted to live there. Each and every time. I've repeatedly spent weeks or months plotting how to overthrow my life and move, trying to figure out how to make it work. Twice I did it: once on Block Island in Rhode Island in college for a summer and once on Koh Tao in Thailand as an adult. But neither of those were real life. They were stopovers. Adventures.

My family's connection to Long Island, Maine, off Portland in Casco Bay, goes back almost a hundred years. My mother's grandmother, Daisy, had a brother who hit it big in the stock market in the 1930s and asked her if she wanted a car or a house at the beach. She chose the beach (smart woman, her), and he bought her a cottage on one end of Fowler's on Long. The house passed to one of my great aunts, and after her husband was killed in a car accident in the 1970s, she had to sell it. Renting in the summer was still an option, but because my anxious dad worried that if something happened to us, we'd not get medical attention quickly enough, for many years, I didn't visit the island.

But eventually we started coming again. Just a couple weeks each summer. Slowly but surely my brother and sister joined with their families, too, so my four nieces don't know a life without the island in it. Lucky girls.

For years, whenever it was time to leave, I was miserable. For a decade, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was supposed to live on Long year-round. The misery would last a few months, and then I'd stuff it down and carry on. How could I move without giving up my job? Enter the pandemic. Enter remote work. Enter even stronger feelings about this place.

But there are so many problems with dreams. I couldn't afford a house on this island. (Still can't.) There's not much long-term rental housing here—like, almost none. And as the pandemic ended, we went back to hybrid work, required to be in the office a couple days a week. Also, what if I moved and hated it? What if I had to undo the whole thing? It took me ten years to make my way back to Boston once already. What if I regretted leaving again?

I'm regularly concerned about regret. I weigh decisions and worry about them. But I'm also an adventurous sort, and I'm not afraid of changing up my life. Then I was getting ready to turn fifty. I started wondering what the hell I was doing in a little apartment in Boston. I was having the sort of mid-life empty-nest feelings that people my age feel, even though I have no kids to help fledge out into the world. I finally decided that staying in a cycle—anticipation, joy, misery, denial, anticipation—was no good for me. I decided, like I had with going back to school for another master's so late in life, that I was too old to not do it. I realized that any eventual regret might be borne of not figuring out how to make my life in this place.

I rented a house for the month of February that year. Because what if I was romanticizing the island in its summer splendor, and I hated it in the off season? February is the hardest, coldest, quietest month on a Maine island. I told people the tester month would either disabuse me of the notion that I should live on the island, or it'd make the desire stronger. But I knew there was no contest. Winter is my boyfriend. The cold never bothered me anyway. That month was amazing.

I put more positive energy into the universe than I perhaps ever had before. A year-round rental turned up. I met new people on the island. I got special permission at work to come into the office in Boston only once a week. I hired movers, packed up my life, and moved to a tiny island. As I write this, I've been here almost two and a half years, and I recently signed a three-year lease on a new rental house. I have friends. I'm on committees. I'm treasurer of the library board. I'm an ambulance driver for the fire and rescue team. I worked with the eight K-5 school kids as they wrote and self-published a picture book last year. Joy.

Maine and this island suit me so much that I feel younger and freer. I'm more distracted—in a good way—while working, while hanging out, everything. So many people in my life were (and are!) enthusiastic about this choice. Some people thought (and still think!) I'm nuts, and that's okay. If I'd listened to the people with that opinion twenty-five years ago, I'd never have traveled the world and taught scuba diving in Thailand.

Ideas and feelings and little inklings of desire can turn into something really grand and even life-changing. Listening to those is how I've lived most of my life, and this is no different. It's an odd juxtaposition to be a person so worried about regret and FOMO (fear of missing out)

and yet also so willing to pull up stakes and change it all up. I'm a walking contradiction.

Without having moved here, I wouldn't be typing this *word*. Or this *word*. An island friend who started a writing group insisted that I join soon after I arrived, even though I protested that I'd not written anything in almost twenty years. I quickly jumped back in, penning poems and short stories. The six other members of "Tommy's Table," as we call ourselves, and I meet and support each other creatively.

My life is more different now than it's ever been. Better. And I love it. I can very clearly say, without question, I have no regrets about moving to a tiny island community that I love and that I pined for before meticulously planning how to become a part of it. No regrets at all. I have only abundant joy.

Karen Boss
Long Island

Sharon Whitham
Great Cranberry Island

Winter Haiku

Learning to be still
Nothing happening today
Same for tomorrow

David Saucier
Isle au Haut

Red Maples in March

The flower buds on the red maple trees are swelling, the branches of both the female trees and the male trees studded with hundreds of globular red buds, each packed with tiny flowers. The flowers have waited all winter inside red bud scales that have protected them from cold and from harsh weather. And now it is March, sap is rising in the xylem, and the buds will soon burst. The male flowers will extend their myriad stamens, each bearing an anther, all bright red, fluttering against the sky and releasing clouds of pollen. The female flowers will stretch their ruby stigmas like reaching arms into the air to catch the flow of pollen. And the wind will carry pollen flower to flower. There is no flower in the first flush of spring that does not want to be embraced by the wind. And all these maple flowers will also feed the first insects—the mason bees, the cellophane bees, the mining bees, the sweat bees—with nectar and pollen. A grain of pollen will alight on each stigma, travel through each style, and enter each ovary, and fertilize each egg, and soon hanging clusters of red-winged samaras will dangle from each branch, and swell with the season, and spin to the earth on a warm spring wind.

And did you know that red maple trees are gender fluid? Some are male, some are female, some are male and female, some are female one year and male the next. They are beautiful no matter what their gender, and the closer you look, the more beautiful they are. No matter which flowers a tree bears—no matter if it is the same gender every year, or changes year to year, or carries flowers of both genders on its branches—the closer you look the more beautiful the flowers are. If you take a magnifying glass to a single female flower, you will see the forked red velvety stigma surrounded by tiny red petals held aloft by the tubular style that descends into the ovary, where there is a nectary prepared for the bee's tongue, where each ovum is

waiting for its grain of pollen. The ovum does not care if its grain of pollen comes on the wind or on a bee's leg. Each female flower has four sisters cupped by the opened bud scales that protected the flowers all winter. And if you take a magnifying glass to a single male flower, you will see multiple filaments, waving like the tentacles of the anemone, as if the wind were the sea, and on the tip of each filament is a red anther that will dry in the spring air and turn yellow with a pompom of pollen ready to dust the body of a bee, or to fly in the wind. The pollen so profligate that we are all breathing it into our lungs while the red maples are blooming. And if our eyes are open, if our spirits are awake, we will understand that all this is beautiful, is natural, is good.

Katherine (Kathy) Fiveash
Isle au Haut
Poem & image

Charles (Sam) Rogers Jr.
Matinicus Island

Eric Norcross
Chebeague Island

THE HEATH*, LATE SEPTEMBER

I was putt-putting down the gravel path along its edge
to visit friends when I just had to stop, awed
by its sheer expanse: the spongy sphagnum “ground’
in so many shades of green and brown, stippled
all over with uplifted luminarias of bright white cotton
grass; scags jutting up through the moss, tall, proud and
silver in their death; here and there, stands of tall, elegant
wool grass, their barmy headdresses, their thin, downturned
leaf arcs ready as guarding scimitars; swathes of blueberry
leaves, burgundy red in what could be celebration or
protest; a border of scraggly larch, their short needles not
yellow, not yet fallen and every-which-way branches like
arms of a cheering crowd, or maybe, again, *Don’t die!*
Don’t do that! But it’s all the rich decomposing material
that makes this place so rich, that feeds, that feeds ongoing
life, allowing it to harbor orchids, (*calopogons, Arethusa*
bulbosa), sundews, pitcher plants, fritillaries, ravens,
eagles, osprey doing reconnaissance, mink trolling for
voles, scurrying along the runnels. The Heath is the soft
center of our island, and, like some earlier humans, we
consider it sacred, careful of it as we’d be of a baby’s
fontanel. This bubbling alchemical cauldron shields
from solar heat, sequesters carbon, filters water, prevents
evaporation and erosion, perpetually transforming what
dies away from what can be reborn. Unlike those who are
offput by a bog, thinking it nothing by a mire to get sucked
up in, we hold ours inviolate. It’s not to be interfered with.
So any deep-pocketed off-islander who dast wander over to
propose “clean up,” infill, luxury, ocean-view homes will
feel our wrath.

*pronounced “Haith,” on our
island along the coast of Maine

Susan Deborah King
Great Cranberry

Isabella Messer
Matinicus Island

An Improbable Circumstance

My wife Carolyn, dog Lilly, and I were at the end of a one-month summer RV camping adventure around the island province of Newfound and Labrador Canada. We stopped in the parking lot of a ski resort, Marble Mt., to make lunch. The resort seemed a bit out of place, appearing extraordinarily out of nowhere, but everything about the landscape of Newfoundland seemed extraordinary!

Marble Mt. I discovered is part of the Appalachian mountain range which extends 2000 miles from Newfoundland to central Alabama in the United States. The Appalachians were created over 400 million years ago and are among the earth's oldest mountains.

We were enjoying a lunch of lobster sandwiches when I remarked to Carolyn, "These sandwiches are delicious!"

"They would cost $30-$40 Down East."

"Yes," she said. "What is so incredulous is how we were gifted the lobster to make these sandwiches."

So Begins an Improbable Circumstance:

On Wednesday, July 17, 2024, a 95-foot longliner, the Elite Navigator, out of New-Wes-Valley which is some 50 miles as the crow flies from the city of Gander, went missing. The boat was last reported to be 130 nautical miles northeast of Fogo Island.

A little something about the city of Gander, population 12,500. When American air space closed on 9-11-2001, Gander citizens hosted nearly 7000 stranded airline passengers for up to a week with food, shelter, and support

as their planes were forced to land at Gander International Airport. There have been numerous chronicles of this remarkable event including: You Are Here, A Come from Far Away, (2018); Operation Yellow Ribbon; Come Away, a Broadway musical hit.

My point is that it is natural for fishing communities to rally to the aid of others no matter what the crisis. The ill-fated event of the Elite Navigator is a poignant reminder of that ethos.

The Elite Navigator had 7 men on board. After 9 days at sea and landing 25,000 pounds of Atlantic turbot, they were about to return home when a fire broke at the exhaust trunking in the engine room. Fire aboard a ship can be the most perilous of catastrophes disabling and sinking a vessel quickly. The captain was forced into a dilemma; continue fighting the fire or abandon the ship! He could choose only one and needed to decide quickly.

Five men put on immersion suits, (survival), and launched one of their two life rafts; there was no time to launch the other as the fire was consuming the boat. Two men without suits were not so lucky and stranded on the bow. To make matters worse, neither man knew how to swim. Two other crewmen with survival suits, left the safety of the raft risking their lives in frigid 50-degree water with 9-foot seas and fog so thick they could see only a few feet in front of them to save their fellow stranded crewmen. At 50-degree water without a suit a person may last 15 minutes and possibly 1 hour or could die instantly from shock.

Toby Peddle, one of the stranded, stated about his fellow crewman, “Harold didn’t want to jump very bad at all.” We told him, “It was either burn or try to live-right.”

Terrified, they jumped and were both hauled aboard the raft, hypothermic but alive. All were safe for now. The story dominated Newfoundland's news an island the size of Germany. From St. John's to Channel-Port aux Basque; All Hands-On Deck! The Coast Guard, Fisherman's Union all fishermen and their families participating in the rescue efforts however they might.

An unwritten understanding expressed by a long-term lobster fisherman from Matinicus Island Maine states, "Don't forget there are two ends to the tow rope and you may be the one at the tail end." In other words, your differences do not matter in a mortal crisis, but helping does. Once again, the ethos of the fishing community. It was now Thursday, a day later, thick fog, no EPIRB (emergency position-indicating radio beacon), or physical sighting. Then Friday, the same as each passing hour painfully thwarted the hopes of the families and marine communities' confidence there would be a rescue.

Miracles of miracles, after more than 50 hours in the life raft Eugene Carter, the captain, deployed the last flare which was spotted by a Coast Guard helicopter and subsequently the men were rescued by a Canadian Coast Guard boat. All were weary but safe. They had survived the ordeal thanks to the heart wrenching decision by the captain to abandon ship, the courage of the two that risked their safety for the men on the bow and the 50 hours of telling stories, encouraging spirits, and even cuddling one another to keep warm.

The Canadian Transport Safety Board found the Elite Navigator carried more safety equipment than was required by regulation. They also found that the master and crew were in the practice of reviewing emergency procedures, scenarios, and responses. These were vital roles that had assured their safety.

On Sunday July 21, there was a Grand Party at New-Wes-Valley harbor for the family, crew now dubbed the lucky 7, and all of Newfoundland to claim their ineffable joy. I confess that two very emotional American campers and their dog, for one bright and shiny moment, temporarily became Newfies.

Now Getting Back To The Sandwiches:

As we continued camping, we found ourselves by serendipity near New-Wes-Valley and decided to visit there one day after the celebrations. I was looking to speak with someone about the ill-fated Elite Navigator, and I cautiously approached a couple and their dog in an old pickup truck to introduce myself. They knew the crew as both were fishermen and were eager for conversation. Not very often they encounter an old man from away nosing around the harbor with an interest in the welfare of the fishing industry. We spoke at length; they were wonderful, Finest Kind! I told them we were camping at Deadman's Bay and they suggested instead we stay in Cape Freels since they are familiar with the area as they have a vegetable garden there. They suggested some sites on a hill where we could look out and see the ocean. (Fishermen in my experience always like to see the water and probably think everyone else does as well.)

Here is where we met Norman:

He was affable, in his 70's, and retired from the fish processing plant in New-Wes-Valley. He saw we were looking for a spot to camp and invited us to stay on his property where he had built a memorial for his deceased wife Greta. Norman had constructed a bench there and every day he sat on the bench reflecting on his marriage to Greta, grieving her passing a year ago.

Greta was born at her family home at this site where the house once stood and attended a school very close by before the provincial government in the ‘60s established The First Resettlement Program to consolidate many disparate and often remote communities. The purpose was to concentrate on resources such as education, healthcare, and government services. Towns would need to vote 60% in favor of merging or selling to the government. Many remote towns did but not all participated, and there remain remote communities accessibly only by boat. The program continues to raise controversy.

Norman spoke of the past. “I only left the island to visit Nova Scotia and my daughter in Toronto,” he said. “My roots are English, and my family has been on the island for 200 years.” Norman spoke of some island changes such as climate. “The lobsters have moved north and east.” “Some Nova Scotia lobsters marked with a hole punched by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, (DFO), are caught in Newfoundland.” He also stated with a sigh of trepidation, "I don’t see the birds of Labrador I used to.”

We stayed two nights sharing stories, and life on Newfoundland. Norman greeted us before our leaving with Cadeau de la Mer, (gifts from the sea): frozen shrimp, salmon, cod fish, and guess what, frozen lobster! I gave him a copy of a book I wrote, Mrs. Binnacle, an allegorical tale of spiritual mystery on the coast of Maine. In the two short days I had with Norman I felt as though I had known him all my life. Finest Kind!

Back to lunch at Marble Mt. Preparing for a 7-hour ferry ride to North Sidney Nova Scotia from Channel-Port aux Basque, I said to Carolyn, “Can you feel how remarkable events might be connected and manifested in to something unexpected? A kind of sublime providence.”

“What are you suggesting?” She replied.

“Well think of it; for some unknown reason a fire unexpectedly starts in an engine room and sends a boat to the bottom of the North Atlantic. Seven men survive 50 hours on a life raft in frigid waters that incidentally the raft was starting to come apart, they were miraculously rescued, and a grand party is had. We visit their harbor, ultimately meet Norman who befriends and gifts us with all this wonderful seafood and now we are enjoying the ill-fated Elite Navigator saga which brings us to these lobster sandwiches. Don’t you have anything to say about this extraordinary confluence of An Improbable Circumstance?”

“Yes.” Said Carolyn.

“Well, What!”

BON APPETIT

Richard Roy
Matinicus Island

An Isle au Haut poem

Upon moving to Isle au Haut,
I could not possibly know,
What my life would be like,
Besides a walk, swim, or hike,
But now I'm starting to know.

Now we live on Isle au Haut,
I feel I'm beginning to grow,
Through solitude, challenges, hardships, and patience,
And only a short time to sow.

Spring, a rebirth, a new year begun.

Summer, the friends, festivities, and fun.

Fall, a sudden hush, the ceasing of summer rush.

Winter, for me come the lessons, taking time for the year's reflections.

So I guess time reveals what life is to be,
Living on a lovely rock in the Sea.

Celeste Saucier
Isle au Haut

PEAKS ISLAND BOAT BOYS

Two morning brothers rowing close to the beach,
Talking and laughing, each to each.
Two rowing brothers that share the same name,
Two happy brothers that don't look the same.

Captain Joe Litchfield
Peaks Island

Taking a Leap

I took a leap of faith in January 2012 and moved to Isle au Haut. I have wanted to move here since I was about four years old. When the Affordable Care Act came into effect and since I was engaged to an Islander, I decided to sell my house in Woolwich, quit my job of 15 years working for a non-profit and start a business on the Island.

My husband and I opened Shore Shop Gifts in May 2012 and for the last 14 years it has been quite a journey being open seven days a week from May to October, open by appointment November through April. We sold Maine made products by Islanders including Isle au Haut, Matinicus, Vinalhaven, Chebeague, North Haven and individuals and wholesalers along the mid-coast from Stonington to South Portland.

All the customers were incredible and came from all over the world. We had two huge maps (United States and a World map) under glass on a fence outside and customers would sign a guest book where they were from, and we would put a colored dot on the map that represented the year they visited the Island.

Over the years, lots of customers brought no money or credit cards with them because they were told there was nothing out on Isle au Haut to purchase! Imagine that! They would come to the gift shop and fall in love with something they would want. I would let them take the item or items, give them my mailing address and they would send me a check. I would also get their contact as well just in case they forgot to send a check. I never had to contact anyone. When they finally returned home, they immediately sent me a check with a lovely note or card thanking me for trusting them. I have never had a bounced check, and nothing was ever stolen. If anything was taken, it was by

mistake, and it happened twice. Both times, I received a card explaining the situation with a check! I didn't even know it had happened! They felt bad when they realized what had been done.

The only sad and upsetting day I ever had at the shop was when a man named Marcel, who was in his late 70s passed away on my boardwalk of a heart attack. It was truly a devastating day. I have never forgotten it. While I was calling 911, a customer was giving Marcel CPR, Alison, the EMT showed up with the defibrillator, Tracy from the boat company was there, Laura and Agata (heart doctor) were leaving the Island but came to help, then Life-Flight came. It was a rough day for everyone including Marcel and certainly his dear wife.

Our famous customers were Chief Justice John Roberts and his family. My husband took him around the Island in his truck. His children loved sitting in the back of the truck eating their ice cream. Peter Ralston, one of the best photographers in Maine and co-founder of Island Institute. The couple who won a trip to the Keeper's House on The Price is Right! They had a wonderful time on the Island and want to come back for a visit. Muriel Anderson a composer, harp guitarist and the first woman to win the National Fingerpicking Guitar Championship! She has collaborated with many other famous artists. Muriel was a joy to meet and gave me her Sailing Dreams CD. The music on this CD was inspired by sailing from Long Island, New York to Penobscot Bay. I had one customer who had to tell me who he was and he is quite famous. Oops, I didn't know him. Now, I must watch Game of Thrones which he directed.

Island authors visit the gift shop and have their books here too. Kathie Fiveash, Harold van Doren, Rachel Harris, Peter Scott, Ian Woollen, Kate Hotchkiss, Tita Bailey, Bob Gerber, Kate Shaffer, Linda and Martha Greenlaw, and

author Katherine Roome who visits the Island every year. I had three of her books and she came in, saw them, and signed the books for me. I love reading Maine authors especially when they write about Maine in their book. It teaches me history about Maine life, its people, and I want to support anything written or made in Maine. Keeping your money local is key to a healthy community and state.

The business had its difficulties. I struggled with QuickBooks, Point of Sales, and cash registers that wouldn't talk to QuickBooks. Too much inventory at the end of a season. Not the right colors, not enough larges, or extra larges. Then I have too many larges and extra larges and no mediums regarding apparel. The shop building was 16' x 20' with no space for inventory. Extra inventory was stored in four large DeWalt locking totes outside in front of the shop (I never locked them.) Getting the consignment checks out in a timely manner. Getting tax information ready for the bookkeeper and the accountant. Being a business owner is a full-time job even if you are open seasonally. I was constantly working and thinking and dreaming about the business and looking for new and creative Maine-made products because many of my customers were regulars. Everywhere I went I was always looking for innovative ideas and new ways to set up the shop creatively.

Through the years, Ellie, Karen T., Grace, Rachel, Karen B., Kim, Barbara, Cynthia, Kris, John, Rob, Tim V., and Celeste helped or worked at the shop. THANK YOU!!

April 2026 I will be retiring and closing Shore Shop Gifts. It has been a pleasure to collaborate with the Islanders who sold their wares in the shop, working with all the non-profits on the Island, and I must say quite a lifelong learning experience to own a business. It was a wonderful journey and leap! But now at 72 a persistent voice is telling

me I must move on and take a different path which, right now, is unknown! I'm sure it will have twists and turns, and I am okay with it, because life is a delightful adventure and I'm looking forward to my next leap of faith. Whatever it is, I will be on my beloved Island to pursue that journey. I can't wait to see what it is, and I feel so blessed to have this life.

Kendra P. Chubbuck
Isle au Haut

Janet Moynihan
Matinicus

Fixing the Broken House

I find myself in a room of my own making,
Literally rebuilt
From non-rotten remnants of a house
where someone else's boy grew up
only to take his own life
at the very point in time
when manhood was to arrive
by law if not yet in body or soul
and who can say what hole that leaves
or makes in once hallowed ground
where the house that housed
the child within
was left to fall in upon itself,
a monument
to a tragic failing
of the human heart.

I could not imagine reasons for this
act of self-violence
designed also to injure permanently
those left behind
And destined the place of origin
never to be entered into
but left to fall in upon itself

Do you love yourself? she had asked.
And why?
He was trying to explain something
He thought normal people must feel
a sensation
in being the object of another's love,

like stepping into the sunshine with your eyes closed
He had a lover who loved him now,
yet he did not experience
the feeling itself
which he imagined others to have.
Did they?
Was there a sensation?

Do you love yourself?
She had asked again
perhaps to reveal something
about flow (between or among)
and ties (broken or lost)
over time and what was it
we might know or be
to each other
if we really tried

The words come back
in the confines
of restored floor and beams and rebuilt roof
new foundation poured into the ground
Where this collapsing wing had sat on almost nothing
except a few random stones at the corners

This reborn space
four skylights now equally spaced
among sturdy roof beams
illuminating in the morning light
a fresh knotty pine floor
bounded by wainscoting milled
from remnants
I could now consider

entirely my own.
Windswept sounds of tall trees all around
A room of 102 panes of divided light
gazing out from three sides onto
gardens and an uphill fieldstone wall
with stone stairs cut in
to reach the terrace
against its sharply rising hill above.

Maybe it is enough
to come into this room each morning
to find some implicit hypnotic charm
no compromise or concession
just incremental steps
toward a place I had somehow in mind.

What patterns we seek
are the patterns we find –
or do they find us?
Painted Moroccan doors, stone walls,
leafy canopies, ground cover,
clumps of ferns
beds of fallen leaves,
we are awash in patterns
as random as their making
yet we see and give their form a name

Write by the clock,
pour words onto the page
like musical scales,
repeated fingerings over and over
until your hands seek and find
meaning of their own making.

Knowledge
that moves into the hands
by the act of doing and habit of repetition,
trial and error

The boy/man took aim
with a stone the size of a watch face
and threw it in the manner
he had done a thousand times
not knowing if this time
he might find
the perfect arc required

there could be
an infinite number
of possible pathways between
here and there
or now and then
connected by the flight of a stone

Why do I feel the need to be broken again
rebroken
apart and reassembled
but with a different ending

Changing anything along the way
would have changed everything
so I could not have come here
and yet here I am
wondering still

Eric Best
Frenchboro

Cara Dolan
Monhegan

Laundry day, Monhegan

Rocks broken from the shore roll back,
And slowly turn to sandy clouds below,
The calm and ordered tidal pool a wrack
Of chaos as a new wave breaks across.

It recalls the wildness of her younger days,
With wind-blown hair, a salt-rimed summer girl.
Nature's made to fall apart, she thinks.
Why is it so reversed for her?

The sun comes out, it’s laundry day.
She sighs and sets about the tasks ahead.
One more long day of chores for her to do,
Till darkness calls her upstairs to their bed.

Remembering her arrival to the island,
Wild parties, wilder boys and girls.
The laundry dances too, bright patterns swirl;
She loves the chaos of the wind and sheets.

Much older now, and past chaotic bedding,
Her life is now routine, with ordered days,
Another ordered year in life’s routines.
What happened to their once disordered ways?

The ordered catenary curves between the pins
Mock the lively chaos of the sheets.
She knows that when she goes upstairs to bed,
There is yet another task before she sleeps.

Barring Coughlin
Peaks Island

Rest in Peace: Phil Crossman, 1944–2025

I can hardly add to what other writers have acclaimed about Phil Crossman in recent tributes to him following his death on December 27, 2025, at home on Vinalhaven. But I can say that the naked butt featured on the cover of Phil's book *Away Happens* is NOT Phil Crossman's. Many assume it is.

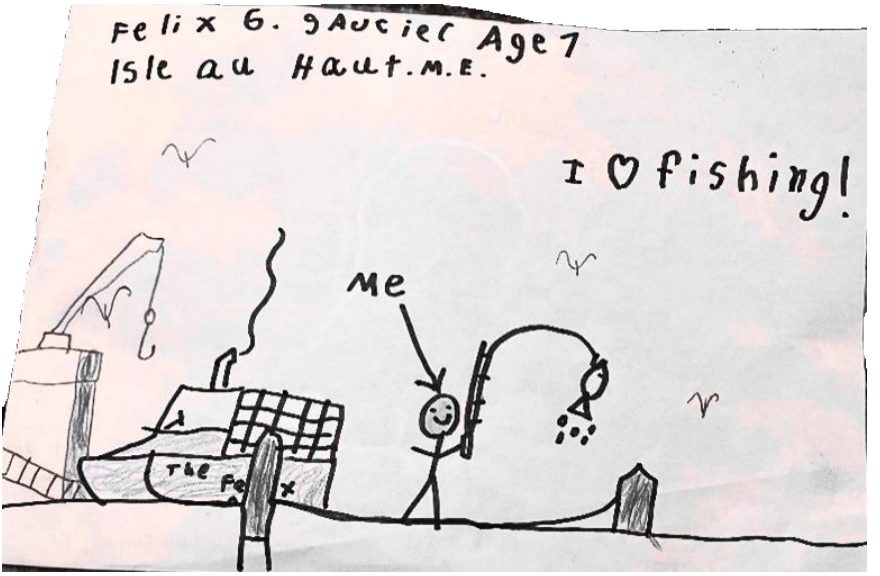
I didn't know Phil as well as many on Vinalhaven, although we both wrote for *The Working Waterfront*, published by Island Institute (Rockland). But his book *Away Happens* gave me the idea for an investigation—a question I felt deserved to be researched. I, along with many others, initially assumed the man with nary a stitch of clothing on featured on Phil's book's cover (pictured from the rear, perched above The Reach, watching as the ferry departed) was the book's author, Phil Crossman. My research revealed, however, it was someone he knew, as probably most islanders did. My query began at a gathering of the Vinalhaven Ladies Garden Club. The first clue, gained from some of these decorous ladies, was being told with a sly smile, "Well, he has a big truck." Not exactly helpful, or as specific as I'd hoped for. Lots of people on Vinalhaven drive big trucks. Finally, a story with more details was shared about this mystery man. It seemed he would go to the island's ferry station every Christmas Day, the only day of the year not a single ferry ran, and therefore the office and parking lot were empty. He'd disrobe and pose at the ramp in his signature move, seen from the rear. That he made that his Christmas card was how many came to know of his hobby. Being "seen from behind," you could say.

My guess is Phil delighted in the fact he a) had a friend who did that kind of thing and b) was willing to do it on a book cover and c) could be mistaken for Phil. I recall that

when *The Working Waterfront* ran a review of Phil's book, that book cover nudity posed a bit of a challenge, and its picture got obscured by a banner placed over the exposed anatomical details. I wish I'd asked Phil his thoughts—what exactly was the cover insinuating? Was the nudity symbolic for—maybe—the book being an expose? Was he tweaking those who would display and sell that very book? Now I wonder if it were the ultimate insider joke, one that only those NOT from away would understand: perhaps just a picture of a man who is comfortable in that pose. And island folks would know who, and that he was.

With the absence of Phil, the island will still have other practical jokers and storytellers and community activists, and volunteers who anticipate how to help before even being asked. Phil was particularly good at recognizing shortcomings, contradictions, and foibles—not just of others, but primarily his own. He believed if a story could serve as a lesson, especially if you recognized yourself in some of the same hapless antics and could laugh at Phil and, vicariously, at yourself, then not only did you gain entertainment but also insight. One story of his was set in a local restaurant where Phil felt the table was on a bit of a slant and needed leveling. His credit card turned out to be just the thing to do it. After the meal, and I don't recall what amount of time later, Phil suddenly remembered his credit card's last use—under the table! He returned to the restaurant. All was well, his card awaited him, still exactly where he'd placed it. I found it a reassuring story, showing how safe life on Vinalhaven could be. Also, a bit about how Phil could be forgetful, but really, about the trustworthiness Vinalhaven enjoys. Vinalhaven is the hero. Phil understood that when "community" wins, we are all winners.

Tina Cohen
Vinalhaven



Felix Saucier
Isle au Haut

Cranberry Road

The gravel beneath my sneakers
The essence of happenings loud in my ears
Buoyant buoys bounce with the bleached boats
out in waters beyond.
The guttural grumble of a car or cart
ascending the road beside me.
A nostalgic breeze,
an osprey's wild *cree*,
a two-mile stretch of Cranberry.

Liam Callahan
Great Cranberry

Allure

What is it that continually draws me here?
To a place where tales of long ago
are still embedded in the minds of many a soul.

What is the word that can describe such a place?
A place with so much to ponder and explore—
Can there be one word?

What is the feeling that overcomes one when through the foggy landscape, the relics of long-ago peer quizzically through the horizon—questioning why you are here.

What are the sounds that overtake any unconscious thoughts?
Is it the sound of the wind as it whips gallantly throughout the village and along the shoreline?
Is it the sound of the birds welcoming your return or warning you of what's to come?
Is it the sound of engines echoing in the harbor as men and women prepare to head out on their quest for the great catch?

What are the smells that overwhelm my being at times, whether good or bad?
Is it the salty smell that the ocean shares as the tide changes?
Is it the smell of fish, seaweed, and bait mingled around the harbor?

What are the memories hidden or explored in this place—
Are they captured through the narrow, twisting, trodden paths of the glorious forest,
Or are they influenced by the moss, the trees, the rocks, or even the fairy houses of new and long ago?

So many questions and so many answers—
Correct or wrong, I do not know.
Whatever I have felt, heard, and smelt—
These things and more, beckon me back home—
A home I call, Monhegan Island.

Terry Wood
Matinicus

Heather Wasklewicz
Peaks Island

A Fond Memory of my Childhood

I remember back in the late ‘70s when Bobby and Gerry Turner and family spent a couple winters at the Myers farm in Head Harbor. Bobby made an ice shack and started ice fishing on the pond. He used to catch a lot of smelts on that end of the pond. Back then there were smelts in the pond as well as Rainbow trout. That’s the first ice house I ever saw. My brother Payson liked the idea of having one and decided to build one as well. He made a light wooden frame and then stretched sheets over the frame tightly and painted the sheets to firm them up. It was very light to move around. I think he painted it grey. Inside was a wooden floor with a big rectangle-shaped hole and a tiny wood stove.

Payson, Bonnie, and I would go to the pond every chance we got. Bonnie and I would usually skate while Payson got the wood stove going and the ice ready and fished a while. I remember how smoky it was in the shack at first until the fire got going good.

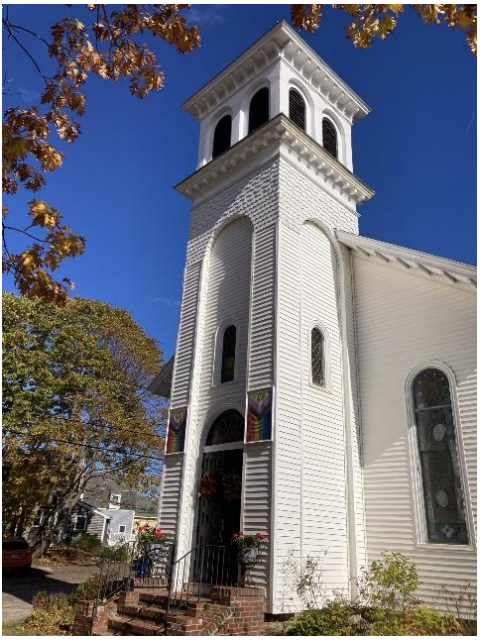
When we were done skating we would go in with Payson to warm up, have a snack, and fish a while. There was just enough room in there for the three of us sitting in a row on upside down buckets in front of the big hole Payson had cut out with a chainsaw. It was a good set-up. Payson put the shack close to Lump Cousins’s camp, if I remember right, so it wasn’t out too far or too deep because we could see bottom very well and could see trout and the occasional smelt swimming around. There didn’t seem to be as many smelts on this end of the pond.

One day we were fishing and Bonnie was sitting on the first stool furthest in the shack, then Payson and me near the door. We were fishing and talking and waiting for

something to bite when all of a sudden a muskrat popped his head up out of the hole!

It scared us half to death, and I remember we let out a few screams and headed for the door. Bonnie was the first one out the door with me and Payson right behind her! That was pretty funny once we were over the shock of it. That made a great story to tell when we got home. We didn't even know there were muskrats down there. We had so much fun in the winters down at the pond fishing and skating. There weren't a lot of smelts caught, but we did catch a few nice trout and had a lot of fun. The pond wasn't stocked back then like it is now.

Kim Barter Stoddard
Isle au Haut



Irv Williams
Peaks Island

Talent Island, Maine
An Outer Island with an Inner Strength

What is it about wanting to live on an outer island off the rugged coast of Maine? Sheer beauty? Hiding from a wild world? Seeking a real estate deal? Maybe, but all such hopes can be quickly dashed upon the rocks of reality: can you survive out there? For me, a pencil-pushing perennial from away, surviving ten miles out in the North Atlantic takes talent I need.

I can write a line, but I can't whip a line. To survive, I need friends and community. Enter: Maine Seacoast Mission and the talented island residents. The mission to the islands was started by two brothers, Christian pastors, over a century ago and now has so many facets. This journal, *The Island Reader,* is an example and allows artists and authors "to showcase the talent of outer island residents." It's where the working waterfront meets the working writer-front.

Following the prompt for this year's edition, it brings me joy to tell you about my experience renovating a home on the harbor and encountering unbelievable talent out on the rock that I'll call *Talent Island*. If you are on a remote island, I bet it is your Talent Island too.

Being a new seasonal resident to the small, remote lobstering community, I was excited but apprehensive. I had spent many summers working next to locals in Southern Maine resorts and had defanged the stranger-danger mindset. Nonetheless, here on the island, I vowed to keep my head down and simply fix up the house and wharf. *Head down* sounds good but on an island, I quickly learned you need help from those around you.

At the outset, Art, the 83-year-old real estate broker, showed me skills way over my head, literally. We were confronted with tree branches encumbering a utility line. Art sensed my predicament. He quietly muttered, “It ain’t nothing,” and tromped off in the snow to his car to fetch a chain saw. He clambered back on the steep grade while priming, choking, and pulling at the contraption until I lost him in a thick cloud of smoke. I saw him set the saw down and put one arm around a branch on the right and his other arm around a branch to his left; then, leveraging himself under the armpits, he proceeded to *walk up* the trunk of the tree until he was completely horizontal and five feet off the ground. He wrapped each leg around the same branches and locked his ankles underneath. Then, doing a levitated sit-up, he hugged the trunk and continued his climb upward. At about 10 feet up he asked for the saw and with one hand made short work of the offending branches.

Then I met Gentleman Jim who knew more about my property than many islanders. Like the story of Bippy, the 10-point buck that would come to the bathroom window for daily feedings. Bippy’s talent was weaving his rack through the bathroom window and eating corn from his host’s hand while on the throne. Bippy is *still* on the island…very still… overlooking someone’s fireplace. Besides storytelling, Gentleman Jim’s talent as a real boxer is only surpassed by his can-do ability to fix anything. He smiles and simply says, “Nothin’ to it, but to do it!”

Then there’s Rooster, the island’s Master Roaster. Before long, I was generating the freshest coffee aroma wafting down our pie-shaped harbor. His coffee fiefdom is both local and international. But this guy is no one-trick pony. His resume includes being an extreme sports enthusiast and an international foodie—for example, kitesurfing in France while driving a food truck into the *avant garde* of *haute cuisine en Provence*!

Talent Island has a museum full of expertise on display. Our painters, photographers, woodcarvers, quilters, knitters each deserve a chapter of descriptions and photos.
One Sunday we were invited by the gentle and brief bidding of the bell of the island's only church. Inside we were notified that a member would be delivering the sermon due to the preacher's absence. Having warmed a few pews in my day, I was all ears. Shortly into her methodical delivery, I was all tears. No kidding. The delivery, the authenticity, the gentle invitation to look inward were perfectly tied to the scripture reading.

The canvas of this picturesque fishing community is balanced by the talented sailors. There's the sojourner who sailed solo in the Pacific for 5000 miles and then authored the best book. Then there's the captain who singlehandedly re-built his bed & breakfast overlooking the harbor and his sloop. He merely doubles as an emergency medical professional and triples as the island's beekeeper. So maybe we have a *Care Bee & Bee* on Talent Island.

There's the Oil Man, a live-aboard sailor-engineer, who can fix anything designed to help you survive. Every island needs the Oil Man.

There's Talent Island's Poet Laureate Capt. Mi Kaptin. Off-island, he launches Fulbright scholars like he does his surfboards on-island; the latter are tethered, the former fly freely.

There's the professor working on a new-fangled electrical power storage concept in his lab in Area 54 on the other side of the island.

There's the TV journalist, attorney, and author whose home was featured on *Oprah*.

There's the Baker Box Lady who places assortments in a window box overlooking the harbor. She lobsters by day and bakes by night.

There's Jaguar James Bond, the six-packed captain who invents electric motorcycles, hauls traps, does eco-tours, and sails the seven seas in the off-season.

Finally, there are the descendants of Talent Island's lobstering legends dating back to the 1800's. These families are still guiding the island like a gyroscopic stabilizer keeping the compass level on a yawing vessel.

So, while there are crosscurrents ahead for such outer islands, here on Talent Island, there is an inner strength that thrives, not just survives. Newcomers and natives alike are made ready for the challenges. Our sunrises are brighter than our sunsets, and both are stunning.

James Bruner
Frenchboro

Rick Ashton
Peaks Island

Island Time

Island time can be … any time
(except the ferry runs on schedule)
The rest of us do
until we're finished
Not looking at a watch
to see
what time it's not
yet

We talk and walk
Sharing what isn't quite news
And yet not really gossip.
Making a quilt of those we know so well
In tight small stitches
A binding up of neighbors

Island time is any time
The heartbeat of the days
where Yellow flowers grow,

Lace and lupin change the sheets
which would be lawns
except that grass is hard to grow
At dawn on island time
Men drink porch coffee
talk men's island business:
telephone poles,
fire trucks,
culling deer,
Weather, always weather
Wind and storm and rain
Some bad, some good,
Acts of a God, who unlike the President,
Never appears at morning coffee.

On island time men talk memories
Of when they were boys
When there were flounder in the Pool
Green crabs too
And would you believe,
how cool it is that
when the tide is out
The mud hums with their song.

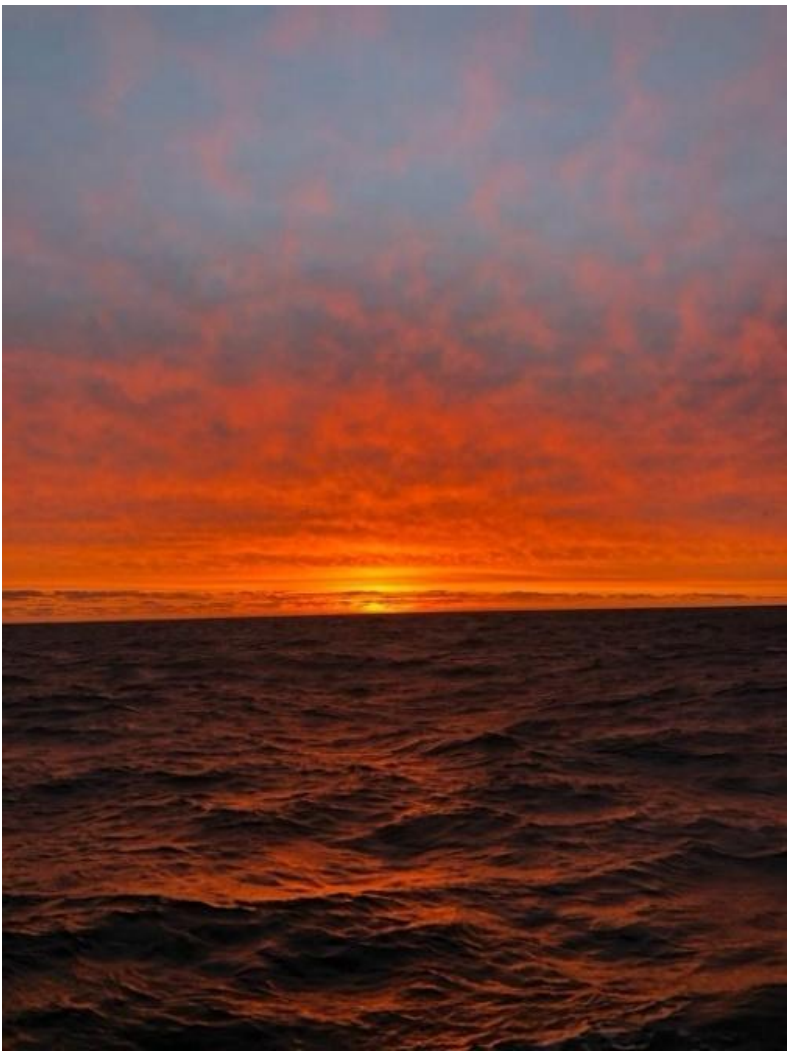
Island time is wood that warms twice
Men's summer work for winter heat
Stacking ricks in different shapes
Door yard or on the porch

On island time: I split kindling,
find curved sticks in knotty logs
To whittle into snakes,
Or I take paints
And make the sky red at dawn,
Before the clear sharp blue of a Canadian High
On island time
Days come, fill up and go
To where, it's hard to know
Without anything to show

Island time
Is mostly other time
Bare feet touching the earth,
Bicycle riding on the only road
Rising and falling on the waves
In a small boat

Living life here.
Really here.

Frederick Appell
Great Cranberry Island



Andy Smith
Frenchboro

Old House

The builder tacked the last shingles to the roof
and went home to supper by horse and cart. Since then
rainfall raps overhead like a family friend,
like a song to settle a restless child in bed.

By day, the browning photos survey the yard.
By night, clouds make milky pockets for the stars.
How many of us, birthed here or away,
have not tumbled headfirst from the back field
into those galaxies, or rolled on a narrow bed upstairs,
where the flies huddle and die over winter?

This summer's dog licks her tenderness on the rug
while dust motes wander and July's newspapers
overflow the coal bin. Come thin October,
the photos on the staircase resume their sleep
after the last fire dies and the cold seeps in.

Liz Grisaru
Islesboro

John DeWitt
Isle au Haut

The Spirit of Matinicus is a dedication to Ann Mitchell of Matinicus Island. Ann will be greatly missed by many but never forgotten for her kindness and courage. In the words of a close friend, “She was a constant support and kind light to the Matinicus community, a safe person, a softener of harsh dynamics, and a generous heart in a cold, rocky place.” Ann’s enduring spirit can be compared and captured in this poem by Bill Bryant, a visitor to the island.

The Spirit of Matinicus

Through the crash and roar
and the thunder of Atlantic’s ceaseless might,

stands a lovely island haven
wrought in beauty, bathed in light.

It has been there unknown ages,
through a million years of life,

never free a single moment
from that ocean’s surging strife.

Yet, it’s head has never been lowered,
and its smile is seldom dimmed;

God put it there – it stands – and will...
brave, sturdy, and surf rimmed.

The lesson of that island fair?
Fight through – stand firm – and smile;

ah, for courage like the Spirit of Matinicus
Lovely Isle!

Bill Bryant
Matinicus

Island Writers & Artists

(photo credit: Ingrid Gaither, Great Cranberry Island)

You are invited to contribute your work to

The Island Reader
Volume 21
Summer 2027

If It Ain't Broke Don't Fix It Edition

Submission deadline:
JANUARY 15, 2027

For complete details visit
seacoastmission.org/islandreader

About Maine Seacoast Mission

In 1905, two Mount Desert Island pastors and brothers, Alexander and Angus MacDonald, sailed a small sloop named *Hope* to islands along the coast of Maine. This trip became the first of many such trips for Maine Seacoast Mission, the nonprofit they founded.

Today, the organization serves the people who live on the rugged islands and Downeast coast of Maine. From its flagship 74-foot vessel the *Sunbeam* and its Downeast campus in Cherryfield, the Mission offers healthcare, education, and community outreach programming. Maine Seacoast Mission is thankful to the communities it works alongside.

To learn more and to donate, please visit: seacoastmission.org

Frederick Appell
Great Cranberry Island