The Catch

Volume 3 Article 1

2015

Full Issue, Volume III

Ellen Goldsmith

Yesterday's Edges

Linda Buckmaster

Editor's Note

I was away all winter, having just retired and wanting to see what it was like to be gone so long. I'm settling back in as I write this, reviewing the winter damage in my yard and at the beaches of Belfast harbor, and picking out signs of spring like the dry-docked floats being powerwashed and the daffodils fighting their way up through last season's debris.

I went to a May full-moon bonfire party down on Lincolnville Beach this week, and as I made my way along the sandy path through dried beach grasses, I caught the smell of woodsmoke and the sound of the sea. The sudden combination was visceral. "I'm home," I said aloud, and then "It's summer," but not in a way that mean it was warm and blooming (which it certainly was not). What I meant was it was that opening time of the year when we all drop our shoulders a bit and breathe in more easily. I traveled in my mind like the ghostshipping Capt'n Lee of Margot Kelley's piece in this volume, past the near islands and "past Monhegan and Manana, a dozen miles from the mainland, out to the open sea."

The selections in this issue reflect the visceral experiences, in all their diversity, of life along the shore and on the water. The writers call up the specificity and physicality of these experiences like Pat Ranzoni's "Touchstone," the poetic ring of sardine brands in Mark Raymond's "Sardines," and the dance of elements of which we are a part in Valerie Lawson's "Nature's Grace."

In "The Old Fisherman," Derek Schrader calls up the connection to our human elements of patience and hope. And who hasn't felt that we were sometimes only "navigating by sound and the scent of spruce on the shore," as Richard Miles' narrator is in "Bearings," or had experienced a "terrible unmooring" like the Capt'n Lee? As Dennis Damon says of his 15-year-old self sitting in a seine skiff many years earlier: " . . . I watched it all. I heard it all. I smelled it and I felt the flowing rhythms of it."

We hope that reading this issue of The Catch will be an opening time for you, and an opportunity to drop your shoulders a bit and breathe in a touch of Downeast Maine.

Valerie Lawson

Nature's Grace

curved lines and a horizon

spinnaker set leafnetsardinespine

pas de deux stone spiral

waltz tango

gliding step then another

no boundaries sky and water

we ask so much

of stone it answers

our touch cool, smooth

heads bent in whispers

we dance we dance

on a granite ledge at the edge of the sea

Mark Raymond

Sardines

Patsy Brand and Rondo, Drummer Boy and Sunset,

Leader, Melon, Martel, Pemco, Stag,

Peacock's Medallion, Peacock's Best, Lookout,

Blue Hen, Red Horse, Possum, Victor Renée, Port Clyde.

Granite stones, round as moons,

fleckered with fish scales like stars;

boots that dance on mussel shells

and dry wrack black as gypsy hair—

I hear the herring singing,

with their little heads all off.

The women at the cannery

have fingers quick as cats.

The working tides eat at you

until there's not a bite left.

Mark Raymond

Lobster Festival

They say at the first in ’47
Robert P. Tristan Coffin,
Pulitzer poet from Brunswick,
ate ten large lobsters at a sitting,

all for a dollar. In the 70’s
you’d come upon flush guys
handing over wadded dollars
to visit the carnival strippers.

Who hasn’t missed the sideshow,
the sea-hags and sardine-packing queen?
When sailors did escort the Sea Goddess and her court
down to the dawn-reddened sea?

Margot Kelley

Ghostshipping

"Captain Lee's gone ghostshipping," the postmistress tells the stout chapped man who'd held the door, silently, and let me pass.

"They start a search?" He asks, shoving a sheaf of mail into his coat pocket without giving it a glance.

"First thing" she nods.

"Think they need more help?"

"Doubt it. Everyone's already looking."

I'm not part of "everyone." Maybe that'll change in time, but for now, I'm still too new to matter. So serious conversations often happen in front of me here, their substance mostly beyond my ken. Invisible, I sort the contents of our P.O. box, separating the few letters meant for us from the mass of catalogs and magazines the woman who had this address before us used to get. As I do, I eavesdrop on the terse exchange. I bet our postal predecessor knew Captain Lee, would have joined the conversation, shared today's worry legitimately. My own concern is more inchoate, for I have never met him.

Or—perhaps—I have. Suddenly, I feel quite sure he's the old man I often see struggling up the Factory Road, inching his way along the curvy incline. He doesn't always seem frail. On other days, he walks purposefully, his gait sure. On those days, he nods hello to me, briskly ducking his head a few degrees, blinking his eyes for half a heart beat. But on the struggling days, he ignores me altogether. This oscillation between confusion and clarity makes me think he has Alzheimer's, so I fight the urge to offer help. I know how much strangers can agitate, and I'd hate to make his hard days worse.

Gone ghostshipping. I've never heard this phrase before, but it's a perfect way to describe Alzheimer wanderings. I think of my grandfather, of those dread-filled days when my grandmother would call family

and neighbors in a panic to tell us he'd "gone off again." Piling into cars and onto bikes, we'd ride in widening rings around town, searching. *Gone off again* seemed a pretty good description of the queasy mix of confusion and movement Alzheimer's can cause, but now that I've heard it, *gone ghostshipping* sounds even closer to what the muddled wanderer must be experiencing—the bewildering sense of the body becoming ungoverned, of being piloted by (at most) a ghost.

I hope Captain Lee sticks to the roads. Hope they find him quickly.

Soon enough, I learn that the old man is *not* Captain Lee, that Captain Lee isn't even a person. There used to be an actual Captain Lee, a man who'd fished from this port for years. A man who taught his sons and neighbors how to rig a boat, drag for groundfish, shrimp in winter. But he's gone now, living on in local memories and as the name of one of the trawlers, *Capt'n Lee*. Some time last night, that trawler broke free, began drifting out to sea. Between Hupper Island and Marshall Point, it bobbed in the dark, missing all the other boats in the harbor, skittering safely past the long ledge lurking just beneath the water's surface off of Hart. It threaded through the half-ring of islands that shelter the port, missing Ram, Seavey, Twobush, and McGee, edging past Toms, Garter, Thompson, and Davis, evading Benner, Allen, Burnt, and Little Burnt, as well as the smaller, but no less rocky Eastern Egg, Little Egg, and Shark. Onward, *Capt'n Lee* traveled, past Monhegan and Manana, a dozen miles from the mainland, out to open ocean.

Today it's especially clear I'm not from here. While "everyone" gathers at the dock, fueling up and listening for news from the Coast Guard, I am sitting at home, dwelling not on the trawler, to be totally honest, but on this delicious word, *ghostshipping*. I now know what it actually means. A ghost ship is a boat found crewless out to sea. *To go ghostshipping* is to be not just an empty vessel, but one actively, aimlessly ranging. The uncaptained *Capt'n* following the tide's own route. A bark borne by the sea's insistence.

Tomorrow evening, the Coast Guard will spot the *Capt'n Lee*, upright, more than seventy miles from home. And around midnight, two boats will reach her, their captains anxiously matching her wayward pace until dawn as they wait for the choppy waters to settle enough to safely board. Braced for far worse, they'll find she's taken on some water, just enough (as it happens) that it saved her from catching fire when the batteries shorted out. The rest, they'll report, is entirely unmuddled: a salt shaker still sits on its shelf; the DVDs are all in a row.

When I run into my neighbor Linda outside the general store, she says much the same thing I've overheard others say lately—that it's a miracle the boat survived. I'm reluctant to disagree, but I can't help thinking that calling it a miracle focuses only on what didn't go wrong in that last stretch and glosses pretty quickly over the force that unmoored a forty-ton boat and carried it out on open waters. To be sure, it *is* wonderful that the boat was not lost, but if a divine being was going to step in anyway, surely it could have let the mooring hold, or the tide be slack, or the boat be spotted sooner?

I understand enough of faith to know my quibbles are entirely beside the point. And heck, maybe Linda is right; maybe it is a miracle. Maybe anything not culminating in premature collapse, not succumbing too soon to inevitable entropy, is cause not just for jubilation, but proof of divine kindness. Or maybe the miracle is the gift of this example, evidence that a vessel adrift is not always doomed. For no doubt other boats will slip their moorings and as folks search they'll murmur "remember *Capt'n Lee*?" to stoke each other's hope.

Miracle or no, something astonishing has happened here; at the edge of the world, where wind and waves and water rule, a rusted hull and threadbare line have just transformed before my eyes. The trawler I couldn't have picked out of the harbor a week ago now seems starkly present, specific. A second skin envelopes the crusty *Capt'n Lee*, the luminous assurance that even a terrible unmooring doesn't always portend the end.

Derrek Schrader

The Old Fisherman

The sun curls over the tips of waves
and the old fisherman's figure goes black
against the flaming backdrop.

He plants his feet on the wooden floor,
steadies himself, rocking, rocking,
in the dawn with the ocean shifting beneath him,

full of life unseen, while he is above,
distant as the rays climbing to greet him
past the horizon.

The warmth will come soon, he knows.

One must be a fisherman to learn patience,
waiting; to learn such hope
that the light will rise again.

And the old fisherman sees it first,
eyes heavy, eyes aching,
from his small rocking boat
as he always does.

Beating the sun to morning.

Richard Miles

Bearings

Constituent
memories of a large memory.

--Louise Gluck

The day awoke this morning

naked and white

as it is every morning

fresh milk in a battered pitcher

but today the world

is dissolved in a blizzard

hills and trees blotted out

by a pointillistic white sheet

I was but also

for not seeing my friends

was not

just as years before lost in fog at sea

navigating by sound and the scent

of spruce on shore

surf breaking in all directions

and the same with the smell of spruce

a fish broke the surface

all the colors of sunset in its skin

for a second I heard music from its depths

then it was gone

strange how all five senses when brought to bear

awaken old dormant ones

I steered my craft in the direction

of the fish's tail

and made it back to harbor

now in the white-out

my inner compass frozen

I wondered if that day I had drowned

I ate a little

drank some tea

read for a while in a sieve-like way

decided I hadn’t drowned

but the wind in the vanished spruce

sounded surf-like

and gazing hard at the window

I saw a fish rend the sheet

Pat Ranzoni

Touchstone

touch this stone
and touch time,
hundreds of millions
of years and beyond

touch this stone
and touch bedrock --
quartz, feldspar,
mica, hornblende --
molten mass,
flow direction,
solidification,
rift and grain

touch this granite
and touch spirit,
heart, sweat, ground
of the people
of the dawn and
its shaper forever

touch this stone

and feel creation

before the wind

touch this stone

and be touched

Dennis Damon

Morning Memory

The first rays of the sun crept silently over the mountain, making their way down the spruced slopes to the mirrored surface of Somes Sound and me. It was the summer of my fifteenth year.

The light woke the earth. First the fish. Then the gulls. Sitting alone in a skiff tied to the seine twine corks a fathom and a half below my keel, I watched it all. I heard it all. I smelled it and I felt the flowing rhythm of it. Life's birth of a new day.

The corks of the seine twine had been sunk before daylight after the fish had been shut off.

They were sunk using pairs of "bollicky" rocks. These pairs consisted of two round popple stones with a hole drilled through the center of each. Into each stone's hole an end of a fathom-long rope was inserted. A wooden shim was hammered in each hole to wedge the rope tight. A pair of these were dropped over the cork line and as many other pairs as were necessary to sink the corks deep enough to allow the herring to swim over them.

The herring were shut off earlier in the night as they swam into the cove where our dories, filled with twine, were anchored. The fish were first noticed when the black night water glowed brightly as we cruised through the cove in the bug-boat. When the man in the bow thumped on the side of the boat or when he stamped his foot on the deck, the water "fired" as the fish startled in unison. Their mass movement stirred the phosphorescence in the water and gave away their location. That fire is what we looked for as we sought the herring.

Once we found them in the cove, we would often take another pass though them with our fathometer running or perhaps with a crew member using a feeling oar to determine how many fish were there. If the captain determined there were at least ten hogsheads in the school we ran the twine.

Running the twine consisted of getting the dories from their anchor, attaching one end of the twine to the shore on one side of the cove then towing the dory, with the twine paying out over its stern, in a long arc across the mouth of the cove, often incorporating more than one dory load of net, to the other

shore of the cove. When the twine was run the cove was effectively sealed. The running twine held to the sea floor by its bottom line of lead weights and floated on the water's surface by its line of cork floats. Between the cork line and the lead line was the twine netting that was the barrier to the herrings' escape.

After the shut off was complete we fashioned a pocket, sometimes called a pound, on the outside of the running twine. It was into this pocket that we would encourage the herring to go. The basic instinct of the herring, one that has enabled them to survive for centuries, is to travel en masse to deeper water where they used to be safe from man-made traps and nets.

The herring did not know, did not even suspect, that I had lowered the corks with the bollicky rocks. They thought they were swimming to deep water as the sun came up. That's what they were supposed to do. They didn't know they were swimming into their final net trap before being pumped out of their world into the hold of the sardine carrier. Once in the hold they would be transported to the factories where they would be put into cans becoming sardines or into the bait pockets of so many thousands of lobster traps.

It is with great sadness that I note the decline of the stop seine herring fishery in Maine. For generations it existed, with its now departed herring weir cousin, as the only two practical ways to catch herring along the Maine coast. Now the purse seiners and the trawlers go off shore to the fish rather than wait for the fish to come to shore, to them. I suppose it is more efficient and practical to catch the herring this way but it does seem to lose something in the process.

Using improved technology that allows us to go get the fish where they have traditionally been able to hide has put pressures on them we did not anticipate and they cannot bear. Perhaps that is why we have had to impose catch quotas on herring and many other marine species and fishing limitations on all our fishermen.

Sitting in a skiff as dawn breaks on the surface of Somes Sound watching the life-blood of the sea flow under your keel is something I wish everyone could do…at least once. The world might be a better place.

Dennis Damon was born in Bar Harbor, Maine, grew up in Northeaster Harbor, and now resides in Trenton. He represented Hancock County, including the population centers of Bar Harbor and Ellsworth, in the Maine Senate from 2002-2010. His writing has appeared in *Fishermen's Voice* and he frequently shares Maine stories at fisheries-related events.

Ellen Goldsmith is a poet and teacher, the author of *Where to Look, Such Distances,* and *No Pine Tree in This Forest Is Perfect,* which won the Hudson Valley Writers' Center 1997 chapbook contest. "The Secret of Life" from *Such Distances* was read by Garrison Keillor on Writer's Almanac. Recent poems have appeared in *Antiphon, Connecticut River Review*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Kin*, *The Mochila Review*, *Off the Coast,* and *Third Wednesday*. A resident of Cushing, Maine, a docent at the Farnsworth Art Museum, she is professor emeritus of The City University of New York.

Margot Anne Kelley is a writer and photographer. Her photographs have been exhibited in group and solo shows throughout the United States, and she is the author of two word-and-image projects: *Local Treasures: Geocaching across America* and *A Field Guide to Other People's Trees.* She has also published essays and poetry in a variety of journals, including *Fourth River*, *Map Literary*, and *The Maine Review.* She lives in St. George, Maine.

Valerie Lawson's work has been published in *Main Street Rag, BigCityLit, About Place Journal*, and others with work forthcoming in *American Arts Quarterly* online. Lawson's first book, *Dog Watch*, was released in 2007. Lawson won awards for Best Narrative Poem and Spoken Word at the Cambridge Poetry Awards and was a finalist in the 2013 Outermost Poetry Prize. A former co-host of the Boston Poetry Slam, Lawson was invited to the First Women of the World Poetry Slam as a Legacy Poet. She co-edits *Off the Coast* literary journal and teaches poetry at Cobscook Community Learning Center and Sunrise Senior College at the University of Maine at Machias with her partner, Michael Brown. In 2012, Lawson became a member of the board of the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance.

The work of Richard Miles has appeared in *The New Yorker, Harper's, Beloit Poetry Journal,* and *American Poetry Review.* He has published a book, *Boat of Two Shores,* and chapbook, *Child.* A stoneworker, Miles has helped restore the Swan's Island Lighthouse and Nash Island Light.

Daughter of a paper mill rigger, Patricia Smith Ranzoni grew up in Bucksport where she is now their first poet laureate. Her great grandfather, Captain William Snowman, sailed out of the Nicholson Building on Main Street in the Caribbean trade. She is an avid freshwater fisherman.

Mark Raymond was born in Portland, Maine, and grew up in Rockland and Owls Head. He attended local schools and studied at Bates College and New York University, earning a Ph.D. in English literature. He currently teaches at James Madison University in the Honors Program and lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, and Owls Head. These are his first published poems since he was in high school, when his work appeared in the *Courier Gazette*, *The Maine Times,* and *Hanging Loose Magazine*.

Derrek Schrader is a third-year student at the University of Maine. He is majoring in English with hopes of becoming an author once he graduates.