

The Catch

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Editor's Note | Linda Buckmaster

“Imagine everything being in place,” begins Baron Wormser’s poem, “An Island Romance” in this year’s edition of *The Catch*. He doesn’t mean that everything is neat and tidy—instead, it’s “the rightness of place that counts.” So it is with this collection of fiction, poetry, history, and essay that celebrate the rightness of place along the Maine coast, which inspires and nurtures but which is by no means neat and tidy.

In this edition we find a range of diversity among marine species (“every kind of fishing you could imagine,” writes Mattie Rodrigue in “An Ocean Venture”) as well as human subspecies: seiners, lobstermen, sardine packers, researchers, drifters, draggers, fossil hunters, blueberry rakers, millworkers, storytellers. What counts is the interconnectedness of the natural world and the people who live here and with each other. And don’t forget the boats, which include a 75-foot research vessel, a rowboat, a scallop dragger, and sardine carriers.

The selections here are not a gathering of nostalgia, although the past of pay packets, second-shift sardine factories, and five and dime stores is honored. It’s a past that forms the basis for the present and the future. Bridges between time are built as in Rodrigue’s report on working a research boat where fishermen and researchers move past an older lifestyle based on large fish stocks to today’s more data-driven approach to fisheries management. The foreman in Mark Raymond’s “Barrens” “won’t talk Spanish” to his immigrant blueberry rakers, yet the narrator notes that “everyone’s come from somewhere else,” even the Micmac and the lichen on the rocks.

Although connections abound, they are not romanticized. There is too much bad weather, death, and necessity for that. As the narrator in Matthew Bernier’s poem “What a Drag” says about his decision to go scalloping in December, “there is no grace upon the waters . . . but \$10 a pound rents religion.” Perhaps there is a bit of magic, too. One of the characters in Peter Spectre’s “Fossil Brothers” tells his friend: “You don’t find fossils. Fossils find you.”

Ubiquitous in this idea of everything being in place are belief, acceptance, continuity, and hope. As the man and woman decide in Jefferson D. Navicky’s piece of magical realism: “Throw your young body against the waves and come up clean.”

We hope you will enjoy this issue of *The Catch* and the special place that inspired it.

An Island Romance | *Baron Wormser*

Imagine everything being in place.
I don't mean only the pins in the drawers
Though I mean that too but I mean
Your feelings – not squashed or pruned –
But right in place and everything around
You in place, too. That's what
An island is, that kind of chance.

I know you can say that everything *is*
In place already, that trees can't dance
And birds shed feathers not leaves
And that's the rightness of place that counts –
And it is – but love gets mixed in here,
The love between men and women,
Husband and wife, that we say
We understand the way we understand
Anything that we do over and over
Till it becomes a kind of weather
But I'm talking about a man and woman
Living together more than forty years
On an island and no one else there.
I'm talking about a real man –
Black hair, medium height, a trace
Of a limp on his left side – and a real
Woman – blonde hair, high voice, small hands –
Who sometime in the late 40's – how about
'47? – came to Sheep Island which no
Longer had any sheep and which had gone
Back to spruce and built a house of cement
He rowed over bag by bag from the big island
And of those spruce he cut and fit into cement
Until it looked like a house in a fairy tale –
Each window casing made by hand,
Each pane set in the sash just so,
Each window placed for the fullest light.

He fished enough and she knitted sweaters
And they lived and people wondered but
They weren't bothering anyone. They had as
Much claim to live on a place that no one
Wanted to live on as anyone. When you saw
The two of them together in Cundy's store
As often as not they were holding hands.

They were neat looking – combed and clean –
But you felt a little uneasy because
You felt how deep love could go.
That it could pull you off into a world
Where you stopped caring about what
Others thought, that the merest touch
Of another hand could make your blood simmer
And softly growl with feeling that had to go off
By itself it was that strong

They never invited
Another soul out there ever. They got older
And they used the boat with the engine
Instead of rowing over but they still held
Hands and lived in that house we
Could picture because we had seen it
In children's story books. That's why
The blather about years and bags
Of cement is just blather – the sorry lint
Of facts, the *believe* in make-believe.
These two people had the sea for ears
And the sky for eyes and when they
Came together as man and woman
The pity of fathoms, the cold ocean notes
That sang outside their windows seemed to waver.

I know about age and death, as did they,
But think of the morning when they sat
By the cook stove they'd hauled out there,
When he came back from the out of doors and she
Put down her handiwork and they sat there
With each other, drinking their tea and
Their mouths making little in-drawing sounds
And their putting their cups down
And how the fullness of being alive
Was the rich heat of their imagining.

An Ocean Venture | *Mattie Rodrigue*

It was my first time on a purse seiner and I had to pee. Normally the head on these giant industrial vessels had a nice toilet-shower combo, but Captain Sam Fuller of the *Ocean Venture* told me that his bathroom facility had accidentally been removed during repairs on the boat, which had been sitting in a harbor rusting for about ten years prior to purchase. He pointed me in the direction of a bucket on deck.

The *Ocean Venture* was a beast of a boat. Seventy-five feet long with a full galley and cabin complete with six bunks and a flat screen. This was a very different fishing trip than I was used to. A graduate student at the University of Maine, I'd been working on the eastern Gulf of Maine Sentinel Survey Fishery project for two years, but still marveled that a girl from Arizona could end up some days fifty miles offshore.

I had already logged dozens of hours longlining and jigging. Normally, I'd join fishermen on a forty-five foot vessel traditionally used for lobstering. We'd set two miles of longline along the bottom, and we'd jig for cod with hand-held lines while we waited. After two hours and usually no cod on the jig, we'd pull up the longline and I'd spend the next two hours getting fish thrown at me off the captain's gaff, slipping around on the deck covered in blood and crap, trying to get my data. The trips never lasted more than eighteen hours (including the drive down to whichever port I was fishing out of that day). But this trip was different. It was mid-November and we were fishing in the middle of Penobscot Bay for one day, and way offshore with no land in sight for another. We were jigging for two straight days, leaning over the sides of a giant, rolling steel monstrosity of a seiner that, on her best day, could get up to eight whole knots. Once a lobster boat came up to us and asked if we were alright; we must have looked ridiculous.

I had boarded the *Ocean Venture* at midnight on the first day. I joined the Captain, Sam Fuller, a recent graduate of Maine Maritime Academy who worked full-time on the *Ocean Venture* carrying herring for giant seiners working for the herring industry. That meant he stayed out on the water for days at a time waiting for purse-seiners to wrap a floating net around a giant ball of herring. Then he and his crew would use a kind of vacuum hose to suck fish out of the seine net and into the refrigerated hold of the boat. The *Ocean Venture* could carry 80,000 pounds of herring, or as the herring guys say, "two trucks," compared to the boat trips I typically joined, where we were lucky if we caught more than 12,000 pounds of fish for a whole season.

Sam's sternman, Kelo Pinkham, was an old-timer: a classic Maine fisherman with the accent to match. He'd done every kind of fishing you could imagine, and he'd had his hand in just about every research project in the Gulf of Maine. Kelo helped design fishing surveys, re-worked shrimp gear to be more selective and efficient, and trawled groundfish all over the Gulf. He knew everybody I knew at the University, everybody I didn't know at the state Department of Marine Resources and Gulf of Maine Research Institute. He was a legend.

A hotshot whip-smart captain, a steady old-timer who could read the Gulf of Maine like a book, and me. I was lucky these guys wanted to take me out on the boat, and lucky that they were putting up with my endless string of questions about fish and fishing

and the ocean. These guys had seen millions of pounds of fish caught in a day, millions packed, and millions of dollars made off the herring feeding in the Gulf. This was the crutch of the lobster industry. Herring is primarily used to bait lobster traps, and if the bait industry stopped, so did the lobster industry. I had been out with the lobstermen who worked part-time on the survey, and had heard their jaw-dropping stories of record hauls, by-catch, and market booms or busts, but I'd never seen the other side of the coin that was the herring fishery.

From asking questions and listening to Sam and Kelo, and talking with them about industry regulations and fisheries management, I was beginning to notice a theme. There was a communication gap between fisheries scientists and fishermen. For example, Sam spoke of the herring fishery closure after quotas were met. The idea was to keep the herring fishery going during the season for as long as possible, so that they could supply bait to the lobster industry. That meant trying to regulate catch numbers so as not to fill the quota in two days. The fishermen called the managers time after time, telling them they were catching thousands of pounds of herring. They must be nearing the limit they said, surely the fishery will be closed soon. The managers, sitting in front of computers at their desks in offices hundreds of miles away, did not react. Sam said the fishermen felt like the managers didn't believe that they were catching so much, because the computer models told them that only sixty percent of the quota had been caught. The guys kept catching the herring because the managers didn't adjust the limit; they would keep fishing and trying to make money until they heard the quota was met. Finally, the managers realized their predictive model was underestimating catch; fishermen had already filled more than ninety percent. The managers reacted by shutting down fishing, almost two months ahead of schedule. The captains were furious, Sam said. Kelo nodded his assent; he had seen his fair share of management-fishermen clashes. I had seen the aftermath of the herring closure on one of the other boats I jigged from. The captain was a full time lobsterman, and he had to start importing rockfish as bait because there was no herring available. He said it was poorer quality and a nightmare to thaw.

This incident was just a little blip on the timeline of fisheries management in the Gulf of Maine. But I began to wonder about how many of these little blips stemmed from the disconnect between managers and fishermen, and how many of these little blips would have to accumulate to result in a large-scale fishery crash. How many blips, little nodes in the system, needed to crash before the whole thing collapsed?

As I was considering all of this, a giant, freezing wave crashed over the side of the boat and on to me, sitting with my pants down, peeing into a bucket on the deck of the *Ocean Venture*.

Barrens | *Mark Raymond*

It's August, overcast. The sky's beached
on these ironed-out hills. Glaciers must've
pressed like this, gray and thick,
as granite centuries ground down
to outwash grit. Slabs of cloud, gunmetal
colored, draw an arctic mirage, cold
as clay—though the air's muggy, and the day
threatens thunder that'll just peter out,
heat lightning, in the west, after sunset.

The man from Lubec, his accent
thick as salt, puts words in the air
slowly, as if they're bricks. He won't talk
Spanish. End of season laborers follow
what he says with their eyes. Tomorrow,
a van drives them to Nova Scotia. Here,
soon enough, a crisp rust will stain the fields.

Everyone's come from somewhere else.
That Micmac woman wasn't here yesterday.
Hulks of canneries, shell heaps, weren't here before.

Even the spruce, the lichen on rock,
wandered from somewhere, like the caribou, once:

speaking Basque, learning the Bible,
hearing gunpowder thunder off stones, following,
as winters come and go, the land as it rises,
alewives running thick in streams.

In My Father's Boots | *Michael G. Dunn*

red rubber body
black rigged bottom
caked in white mud.

 The boots lay hidden in the closet,
 never cleaned,
 not worn in years.

Perhaps, to my Dad,
these boots were shackles,
binding him to the grinder's
spinning, screaming blades.
They were the awkward weight
of dreams unrealized,
of a thousand empty bottles,
of a body broken by strain.
Perhaps, that's why he left them behind.

The musk of the mill still remains on them,
the stink of wood, steel and heat.
Reaching inside, there is an aura of sweat,
of hellish days and nights.
Mom has yet to get rid of the boots,
though she knows he'll never need them again.
But, there they remain,
in the closet, behind the boxes,
a silent,
pungent,
brutal
reminder.

What A Drag | *Matthew Bernier*

He read about the singing scallops
of the Pacific
and thought how nice
to hear music
as one's boat sinks beneath the waves;

the Atlantic sea scallop
sulks in crevices
in Cobscook Bay;
he'd ignore them
but they announced a season for December

and his two kids want Christmas;
the day before,
on the sonogram,
a new arrival,
she's happy, but his mind is chained

by NOAA Coast Survey image near Falls Island,
wreck clearly visible,
sixteen Bay of Fundy deaths
within five years,
the drag catches, the heart leaps, then stops;

this cold morning sea smoke
wafts like incense,
a priest's blessing
is required, doesn't come;
there is no grace upon the waters

tearing through Cobscook Falls
but \$10 a pound
rents religion;
someday, he swears,
he will follow his scallops to

the white tablecloth of a fancy restaurant,
where red wines
bleed freely
like cut palms
on the wheel of a scallop dragger;

she, in way of the Virgin Mary,
deserves more,
fortune reversing
with reversing tide;
above: the smell of salted diesel;

below: scallop's hundred eyes watching
gravel bounce
beneath steel dredge;
outcrop of ledge,
missed by chart, reaching up from Hell.

Journey of the Swim, or Cannery: A Parable of Reproduction | *Jefferson D. Navicky*

*May we be blessed by
the spirits of these fish*

—Gary Lawless

Such things only happen in the summer up here. They'd closed it up for good some time ago. But that just opened it for a different kind of commerce. He was up from down south, kept making his way north, farther and farther, a drifter, a musician who went by the name of Brother Adam, but who wasn't really a musician, only told people that, more of a drifter with a harmonica to fit the image.

With a snap, a pry and a squeeze, he was in. Stale air layered above the forever linger of fish. He didn't mind. Never did, you go on and live with it. Tell you one thing, he ain't gonna change much. He settled in. As much as ever. The air seemed to pass through his hollowed mind, not an easy feat, but he'd done it through roads and time. He hid it all in his big, bushy white beard, and after enough years, beard absorbed it, took him in and left him there with pleasant eyes of a pale shade.

He moved around. This took a few weeks. His portly form, recognized around town, got called "Gandalf" a few times by some punk kids, fine, let them laugh, "Fat Gandalf." Indeed, harrumph. Whatever.

He came home at night, careful not to shine lights too obvious in the fishery windows. Took to eating sardines with fingers, in honor of his surroundings, an offering to the fishery gods of past, bit of a sacrifice at first, then he grew to like them. And of course, those little fishies cheap, yeah. Got them at the dollar store where everything except sardines is more than a dollar, seventy-five cents, as they should be. They used to say, we were packed liked sardines, *i.e.* small, cheap, tightly-packed. He was not a sardine in the fishery, no, one measly fat gray sardine in a large hollow tin, dark and full of echoes.

One night, he heard a noise among the noises, a singular clank among the many tiny mouse/rat jangles. Ignore it, must be nothing, making it up, hearing things. Imagining. Stars. Make that sound. He sang to himself and it went away. Didn't hear it again. Only the dripping of time.

He went back out and out into the days of the week as he'd always done, against the onslaught of the wonderful story that wasn't, against death and everybody, and the perpetual unanswerable question: where you from? Something was always lost.

He muttered this to himself, smiled, ducked and pried his way into the fishery, downed the light, and walked as if through the salt cod black sea—

A falling shoosh and suddenly he was surrounded by something like shantung, first word that came to his mind, don't know why, but whatever the fabric, it draped on him with a stultifying gauze weight, couldn't move and when he tried, he only made it worse.

He bellowed.

“You sound like a sea cow. Relax.” A woman’s voice. She stepped out. “I caught ya, didn’t I? Netted ya just like they used to in the old days out there on the high seas.”

He grunted.

“Didn’t I, didn’t I...” She tittered and paced, did a little gotcha-shuffle and her rag of robes spun around her in a twirling fanfare. “Yes I did.”

The hours revealed her to be Anty, or maybe Aunty, she didn’t spell it. Another drifter, but with a bit of a...weird streak. He didn’t know. She had as much gray hair on her head as he did on his face; together, they’d be a full head face ball of gray.

“You’re such a catch,” she said like he was a young doctor who she’d lassoed into marriage.

After some time, his blood pressure came back down, he could think again, talk.

“Water...” he croaked. “Water...”

“Oh you big baby, I’m not going to starve you. I ain’t gonna let you waste away.”

And she didn’t. She fed him nice. Hot coffee from somewhere, tasty little victuals for the setting, chips, cured meat. But she also didn’t let him go. She stayed chatty. In time everything changes, and although they were still strangers with an element of danger, they became something else.

Anty told him her story, the glossed-over version that hid the deep and terrible lows -- they weren’t that close yet -- but spun them into an honest, vulnerable pitch with a pinch of sass, you know what I mean.

Brother Adam began to talk too beneath the net. It was like he was talking through a darkened web, because he was, but for some reason, surprising to him, this was comforting, and indeed even inspired a certain loquacity that hadn’t peeked out of him in years and years of the downtrodden. Captivity, in fact, seemed to suit him, giving way to a fishery domesticity that eventually forced them to confront each other.

“What are we doing?!”

“Why did you trap me?”

“Why didn’t you put up more of a fight?”

“Are you crazy?”

“Are you crazy?”

Indeed, love, or one of its derivatives, had taken root. And speaking of root, she got under the net there with him. In other words, they fucked like old people, which is to say they knew what they were doing, which is to say they also didn’t want to hurt themselves. The fishery took on another fishy smell. They complimented each other.

Time passed in little crunk components. Little fits and starts. Dissolved, bubbled back up to float, pool, eddy, rage forward with a king tide, and pull way back to the ocean’s edge.

Spring came and they didn’t hate each other. Then, strangest of strangest, she began to show.

“What’s that?”

“My bump.”

“Your bump. You bump like that? You been swallowing whole bowling balls?”

“I think I’m bumping a baby.”

“Thought you mega-paused and all that.”

“Me too. Guess not.”

“Huh. Don’t know what I think about that.”

“Me neither.”

And so they did their best not to think about it at all. But, as babies do, that belly interjected itself into about everything. It had its way. Emergent. Like everybody’s already been born and I want to do it too.

“Will I have a gray-haired baby?” she thought, “an old soul? As they say...” She prepared. She didn’t know who “they” were, but knew they did indeed say it.

He thought about the old days, thought back as far as he could, but couldn’t get back to babydom, that misty memory field fallow as any blackness. What would they do?

The problem was that time ate itself, and before either of them had a bead on perpetuity, it came out in a rush of water. The baby. The boy. A whole lot of loving to keep my baby happy, true true, and they called him Sardine, because of his silvery skin, puckered mouth and he was so darn small, compact. How it takes a whole lot of kissing and hugging. A whole lot of decision-making.

And they decided, or it was decided for them because the weather was getting warmer, earlier, and it became harder to be themselves with their squatting frugality in a swelling town of tourists, and so they decided to set their baby free, because all babies, as everybody knows, want to be free and so they set Sardine into the ocean to be free, feed everybody with his flesh, ubiquitous, breed and make merry. Throw your young body against the waves and come up clean, son, once uncountable volumes, come back, quicksilver, torn by the spirits swimming through our world. In a word: hope.

Fossil Brothers | *Peter Spectre*

*As we acquire more knowledge,
things do not become more comprehensible, but more mysterious.*
—Albert Schweitzer

George said—and you have to trust me here, because George is no longer with us and therefore can neither confirm nor deny any of this—"Pete, don't kid yourself. You don't find fossils. Fossils find you."

Which at the moment sounded like the biggest pile of hogwash I'd heard since one of our associates had suggested that the way to a higher level of consciousness was to build an orgone box and get in it.

George also said that once the ice had been broken—once the first fossil had found me—fossils would be coming on like gangbusters, that I would have to work overtime to keep them away. That's because I would have tapped into the elemental hum of the ancient universe. (I haven't put quotation marks around the latter statement, because I'm not sure those are the exact words George used. He could just as easily have said "the heart of the universal zeitgeist.")

Which is interesting, because George, who to my mind was wrong more often than right when it came to touchy-feely matters, turned out to be right on both counts. In short order I found a fossil, or, perhaps, a fossil found me, and more fossils came on like gangbusters and have yet to stop.

As evidence of the latter I offer a subsequent experience one winter in England. I was staying overnight in Lyme Regis, a tiny town on the seam between Dorset and Devon, on the South Coast overlooking the English Channel. After supper I strolled up the street to a nearby pub, The Volunteer, for a pint or two of bitter ale. The publican, in response to my query about whether his town had a claim to fame and what that might be if it did, said, "Fossils."

"Really?" I said.

"Really," he said. "Tomorrow morning, if you have time, walk up the hill over there to the second lane on the left and take it down to a path that leads to the shore. Follow the shore to the base of a cliff. The fossils are there."

So the next morning after breakfast, before I pulled out of town, I took the lane, the path, the shore, the cliff. There were seagulls and salt grass and crashing surf. There were driftwood, flotsam, and jetsam at the high-tide line. There were million-year-old fossils sticking out of the face of the cliff like nuggets in El Dorado. I picked up enough to set off the "Overweight" light at the airport on my return flight, including a piece of ancient shell so big and heavy that it can be used for a door stop.

George, on seeing the haul when I got home, said, "See what I meant? Gangbusters."

My first fossil came some time in the early 1970s. My guess is that it was in the late spring, because I recall the weather was cool yet we were already slapping mosquitoes as we walked.

I had taken the ferryboat from Rockland, on the western side of Penobscot Bay, to the island of Vinalhaven, in the middle of the bay, to see George. George was living with the fishermen. He was also trying to make a go of it as a freelance writer. I used to travel out there every few weeks or so, and we would take long walks around the island and tell each other long, shaggy-dog tales about things we had seen, or heard, or thought we knew.

Mostly it was ranting and raving.

George might ask what I had been doing for fun in the last few weeks, and I might say I had been organizing my workshop to build a rowboat but I was having trouble finding the right tools, and that would set him off:

"You can't get decent tools, you know," he'd say. "You can go into a hardware store and they throw blister-packed trash at you. If there's any steel at all in them it isn't tempered steel. And most of the time there's only one size of each tool—medium and useless. Who ever heard of medium for crying out loud? Everything is either small or large. Look at a proper tool kit and the medium-size tools are the least worn. And of course the bloody good tools that used to be available are all hanging on restaurant and barroom walls. Oh sure, you can send off to these fine tool catalog outfits and get English and German planes at piles of money apiece, several-hundred-dollar workbenches, monogrammed screw extractors, and full-size drawings for a seventeenth-century mandolin, but try to get a boatslick or a lipped adz, show me a ship auger and I'll quit smoking, lead me to a boatbuilder's bevel, backing iron, or spud and I'll take esoteric vows, and materials to work with, Great Hornitoads you can't get the wood, and no copper rivets and roves, it's a conspiracy, some heinous troll is sitting atop a mountain of OUR TOOLS, OUR WOOD, and we gotta find the bastards to liberate what is ours, to find peace and freedom and the knowledge that we can do it ourselves once again, to know joy again in the beatitude of one's very own shop where personal expression once again blossoms across the land, and oh Lordy..."

"Right," I'd say, taking a hit off my can of beer. "But what exactly do you mean by joy?"

Generally, we had an informal division of labor when it came to rants. George took care of technology, science, what he called "psycho-emotional matters," and manly-man stuff like guns, fishing, dogs, thickness planers, with a strong emphasis on geology, coastal ecology, and the management of woodlots. I was in charge of personal history, interrelationships, the meaning of things, nostalgia, politics, and gender studies, which in those days came under the heading, "Women." We tended to share literature, rock 'n' roll criticism, and the analysis of stupidity.

The way it worked was this: I'd come in on the early-morning ferry. George would meet me at the landing, usually in an old rusting pickup truck with his dog Sylvia, a long, lean, high-strung Borzoi, pacing around in the back. We'd drive into town for fried eggs and home fries at a little greasy spoon, and we'd always have lots of coffee. Lots and lots of coffee. Enough so that afterwards it seemed as if our eyeballs were rolling around on sticks.

"What'll it be today, Pete?" George would say, out in the street, wired.

"What've you got?" I'd say.

"Let's see," he'd say. "I've got summer beach, winter beach, woods and fields, bushwhacker's paradise, historical quarries, heights with an overlook, lighthouses and headlands, or free-form. You're king for a day. Take your pick."

On the day in question, I took winter beach, so we got in the truck, drove over to the East Side, and parked on the side of a dirt road that led down to an old saltwater farm. Sylvia took off like a rocket into the puckerbrush.

We walked down the dirt road for awhile and then took a shortcut through the woods. George went off on a monologue about the deleterious effects of blow-downs on stands of mature spruce. We came out into an open field. I countered with an analysis of why exposing Richard Nixon as a pathological liar was right and good for justice but bad for the future of rational political discourse. While we crossed the field, we both agreed that if we had it to do all over again, we'd learn lead guitar, strike a pose, and join a rock 'n' roll band. ("Stratocaster," George said. "Pink lacquer body with powder-blue appliqués.")

At the far edge of the field was a berm of loose stones, broken lobster traps and crates, bits and pieces of frayed pot warp, rusted oil cans, and plastic detergent bottles brittle from exposure to salt water and ultraviolet light. This marked the limit of the most extreme high tide—the highest high tides—the most awe-inspiring tides, at once pulled by the moon and driven by the furies of winter. (The existence of such a berm was what identified this as a winter beach.)

We climbed over the top and bango! There we were, face to face with one of the most spectacular sights on the coast of Maine. Ocean and ledges and islands and half-tide rocks to the horizon. Wreck Ledge, Bunker Ledge, Old Horse Ledge; Sheep Island, Hay Island, Brimstone Island; Shag, Yellow, and Diamond Rocks. The lighthouse on Saddleback Ledge to our left, the one on Heron Neck to our right.

In the far distance the ocean rose and fell in long, undulating swells, as if it were breathing. In the middle distance it surged through passages between the ledges and rocks. Immediately offshore, it gathered itself together, drew itself up to full height, rolled forward like a freight train without brakes on the steepest of grades, and threw itself on the beach. The effect was like five hundred strongmen hitting the same stump at the same time with ten-pound sledgehammers. The sea thundered. The ground shook.

The beach consisted of huge boulders as big as a man's head, rounded and ovaled by centuries of rolling in the surf. The rocks rolled forward as the waves surged up the beach; they rolled backward as the waves receded; they ground against each other; they bounced along like gigantic marbles. The rote—the sound of the ocean working the shore—was horrific.



So there we were, walking along our winter beach, George and I, Sylvia off in the distance running after the sea birds. George, inspired by the beach stones, was declaiming on geology. I was lost in my own thoughts, following a line that branched off the main into... where?... I'm not sure I can say. Something about the setting, the violence of the sea on the land, the slant of the light, the barrenness of the ledges, had turned me inward. I could register a discrete word here and there from George, but I didn't have the foggiest notion what he was saying.

"Strata"... "Devonian"... "Glaciated"... "Schist"... "Fracture zone"...
"Sedimentary"... "Fossil"...

"Fossil?" I said, wallowing up from the depths. "Did you say something about a fossil?"

"Three or four years ago," George said, "Right here on this spot."

Now, I don't know much about geology, but I do know that fossils are generally found in soft, sedimentary formations, and that pieces of rock from such formations wouldn't last fifteen minutes on a beach such as this. All those rolling granite boulders would grind them up in no time at all.

"Impossible," I said.

"Maybe so," George said, "but it happened."

"Well then," I said, "I've always wanted to find a fossil. If you found one here, so can I."

And that's when George said, "Pete, don't kid yourself. You don't find fossils. Fossils find you."

And that's when I reached down and picked up a long, thin piece of stone. It was of the sedimentary type. It had broken away from another stone, and the flattish seam of the break was studded with scores of tiny shell fossils, somewhat like miniature scallops.

I can't begin to describe the feeling of triumph, of power, of blessedness that that first fossil gave me. If I could have done a standing back flip, I would have. I showed the prize to George.



George turned the rock over and over in his hands, feeling it, studying it. He seemed perplexed.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"I've seen this stone before," he said quietly.

"What?"

"This is the fossil I found a few years ago."

"You mean you found it and put it back?"

"No, I found it and took it home."

"Then how did it get back here?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's in both places."

We called for Sylvia and ran back along the way we came. The beach, the berm, the field, the woods, the dirt road, the truck, George's place, the front door, the hall, the living room, the windowsill. There on the windowsill was George's fossil. It was a long, thin piece of stone. It was of the sedimentary type. It had broken away from another stone, and the flattish seam of the break was studded with scores of tiny shell fossils, somewhat like miniature scallops. I aligned my fossil, face down, with George's, face up. They fit together exactly.

A sedimentary stone had survived for centuries on a beach that was anathema to it. It had broken in half along a seam. One person had found half. Three or four years later, another person, a best friend in the presence of the first, had found the other half. I won't bore you with an accounting of the odds.

I am sitting in a room in a house on the coast of Maine, about fifteen miles as the crow flies from our winter beach on Vinalhaven. In the distance I can see a similar beach, and islands, and rocks, and ledges, and the ocean surging among them. On the table in front of me are our fossil-bearing stones, George's and mine.

As I said, George is no longer with us. Before he left we were talking about old times, about some of the wondrous things we had seen over the years.

"Do you still have the fossil?" I said.

"Of course," he said.

"Good," I said, but I wanted to say more. I wanted to ask him if I could have his fossil. I didn't want to see it simply disappear because those left behind might not know what it really meant. But I couldn't ask, and, I expect, he couldn't offer. To do so would be to admit that our island-walking days were over.

George died of cancer a few days later. At his funeral, on a wild, stormy day on the island, I asked his wife if she had seen the fossil. No, she hadn't. I asked his daughter. No, she hadn't. His son. No.

One day, a couple of years later, there was a knock on my door. It was George's wife. She came in and sat down, and we drank coffee and talked for awhile.

"I was going through George's things," she said, "and I found something you might be interested in." She pulled the fossil from her bag. "Show me how they fit together."

So I did. Like a glove.

"Keep them together," she said. "They belong that way."

I have been studying the stones off and on for a couple of days now. One side of mine is the outside of the original stone before it broke and is therefore smooth. The other side, the seam side, is jagged with fossilized shells. One side of George's, the matching side with mine, is jagged with fossils. What I have never noticed before, or what I have noticed and have never registered, is that the other side of George's stone is also jagged with fossils. My stone had split off from George's, and George's had split off from another.

Somewhere on our winter beach, or somewhere on someone's windowsill or someone's mantelpiece or someone's kitchen table, lies a piece of stone that fits together with ours as cleanly as the elements of the most expensive Swiss watch.

I won't bore you with an accounting of the odds. But I will suggest that, given everything that has come to pass already, the odds that this is true, as great as they may be, are with us.

The Egg Masses of the Moon Snail *Lunatia heros* / *Kim Roberts*

Every living thing between high tide and low is a colonist who meets his sea of troubles day by day in a quiet but effective manner.

— N.J. Berrill and Jacquelyn Berrill, *1001 Questions Answered about the Seashore*

At low tide, long trails
wind through the sand flats.
The enormous foot
of the moon snail glides
rapidly through soft

sand, never breaking
the surface, in search
of clams. Such deftness,
a flood through its pale,
pulsing, salty flesh.

The moon egg cases,
extruded from the
mantle cavity—
one continuous
gelatinous sheet—

resemble rubber
plungers plumbers use
to open clogged drains.
Sand cements mucous;
each one contains half

a million larvae.
You can find dislodged
egg masses, green-gray,
at low tide, detached
clergyman's collars

errant and wasted.

For the Blue Crab | *J.D. Smith*

Those who refuse its flesh
out of conviction or creed,
for allergy, palate or squeamishness,
would still find themselves poorer
if trap and bed of ice did not hold—
besides reds and browns, silver scales
or downward-facing white—
a solid, near fractal of sky.

Long Reach Cove | *Sally Bliumis-Dunn*

The tide's little waves
like lines of script rush by us,
too small or faraway to read

like ghosts of all the letters
we used to write and now
from them cannot recall

a single thread or story,
the ones we wrote by flashlight
beneath a billowy sheet

or in the sinewy shade of a maple
or from a simple wooden desk
one mothy night at camp.

So much back then
of taking the self by the hand
to a place that was mostly quiet

so we could put our ear to its wall
and listen, pen in hand.

Hattie Bagley | Stephanie S. Gough

The following is based on the memories of 98-year-old Alice (née Boyden) Gough, an Eastport native and longtime resident of Campobello Island, who spent two seasons as a bookkeeper at R.J. Peacock Canning Company's #2 factory, 1937-1938.

The *Lubec* rounded the Friar,¹ white bow and wheelhouse becoming starboard and stern as the ferry chugged into full view. She let loose with a shrill whistle scream meant for Alice.

The young woman threw on a suede coat, one arm in, one arm out, one stockinged foot slipped into a saddle shoe, then another, and out the door, where she could see the boat now passing the Shag.² She broke into a run, dark curls bobbing. Her father-in-law watched her go, judged the distance from the *Lubec* to the Welshpool wharf and shook his head. She'd be late again.

Down in the 'pool, Alice slowed to a trot as she neared the wharf. The men on board the ferry beamed their good mornings. On most days, she was the only passenger picked up there and they would wait for her to arrive. She took a seat at the stern, next to Moses Pike, pausing a moment to catch her breath. The captain threw the boat into reverse before heading her towards their destination, Eastport, Maine.

R.J. Peacock Canning Co.'s #2 factory jutted out over the beach in Eastport's North End and into the cold waters of the Passamaquoddy Bay.³ The office was not in fact adjoined to the factory but occupied one end of the building where the barrels of cotton seed oil were kept. It was April of 1937, and Alice had just begun her first season as bookkeeper for the cannery. She shared the office with the factory manager, Horace Bagley, a tall, thoughtful man, nearing sixty.

The room had a wooden floor, with a small sink in one corner and a wood stove in another. Horace's desk was on the back side. Alice's was on the waterside, next to a window that provided her with a view of Campobello Island across the bay. There was a small bathroom, where the 19-year-old would comb her hair and freshen up. "The soap they had there was gray looking and I used to brush my teeth with that," she said.

The office was a quiet oasis of civility, a stone's throw from the hustle and bustle, smells, shouts and sounds of the cannery, running at full tilt beside it. There, herring chokers, dozens of women who stood at the packing tables snipping the heads off the fish, systematically packed cans with sometimes four herring, sometimes six. The noise of their chatter mixed with the industrial clangs of iron and hisses of steam as the fish were flaked, steamed, packed, stacked, filled with oil or mustard and sealed in tins.

On the south side of the office, there was a small window that looked upon the houses, clotheslines and canneries of the North End. Next to the window was the office door, and it wasn't too long before Horace's wife strode through it.

"I'm Hattie Bagley," she said smiling in Alice's direction.

Alice took in her attire, typical for a sardine packer—stained white apron, hair tied back by kerchief—and struggled to keep her mouth from dropping open. "She was

packing sardines. I couldn't believe it. *The boss's wife!* In Eastport, the boss's wife would never, ever go in the factory and pack sardines. You could have knocked me over with a feather."

The Bagleys were from Whiting, but they owned a house in Lubec, up on the hill by the Catholic Church. Hattie wanted a new sink for it so she was packing fish that year to get the money to buy it. It wasn't just any sink—it was a Monel Metal sink, six feet long, double drain board, shiny bluish grey, and very expensive.⁴ Alice didn't know anyone else who had one. Hattie spent so much time talking about it and treated the sales representative with such reverence that when he came by in early days of her new job, Alice mistook him for the factory owner.

Yet there was more. During the summer months in order to be closer to work, *Horace and Hattie lived in one of the factory camps!* Though the Bagley's camp was a little nicer than the infamous skid row that Eastport's cannery housing had become, with a little porch and a couple of rooms, and down closer to the water, it was still... *shocking*.

"People from Eastport who didn't have much money stayed in the camps. They stayed in them year round. When I was there, none of them worked in the factory and they were poor. There must have been six or seven camps at Number Two. They were in a row, made from wood and painted red," says Alice.

"I was never inside of one."

Alice was from Eastport, but the year before she had married a young fisherman from Campobello named Joe Gough. Boats had suddenly taken her interest. From her desk at #2, she had a clear view of the low, graceful sardine carriers coming and going at the factory wharf. She quickly learned all their names by heart. "Every time a boat was in sight on the water, the men would name it, but I always knew it before they said it," she said proudly.

On her lunch break, Alice would walk downtown to the *Sentinel* office where her friend Amy Pike worked. They would buy a tomato and some cheese at the A&P, before wandering across the street to look at the shops. Next to the grocer's was Carroll Hickey's shoe store. When Alice came through the door, Hickey greeted her by shouting out her shoe size: "Number Six!"

From Hickey's, Alice and Amy would pass by Nina Lovell's variety store, packed with oddities, and Aimondo Conti's, where Joe liked to buy his cigarettes and oranges and bananas. "They were Italian, the Contis. Joe liked Conti, and Conti liked Joe. Once Joe went in and Conti passed him a twenty dollar bill and told him he had dropped it there the week before. I thought that was nice of him," says Alice.

At J.J. Newberry's on the corner of Water and Boynton, the young women would browse the selection of rouges, lipsticks, bobby pins, ladies' underwear and hair lotions. Amy had a wealthy Aunt Lavinia from New York who often sent her clothing in the latest styles. She was petite, with shoulder length brown hair set in waves and had a nice figure. She was never long without a beau and lunchtime conversation revolved around the latest.

Across from Newberry's, the girls studied the posters at the Acme movie theatre, next to Wadsworth's wharf where the *Lubec* docked. Just past Berman's clothing store

was Alice's favorite shop, Samuel Kramer's. "I always bought my clothes at Kramer's. He was Jewish. If he thought there was something I would like, he would save it until I got over there. I still have a green wool suit up in the attic, a jacket and skirt. It was really expensive, but he didn't sell it so he let me have it at a good price. He always gave me a good buy. I was very stylish, or thought I was."

Past the Waco Diner, where Izzy Levin⁵ was often waiting by his taxi, the girls could make out the Hotel East on Sea Street, alongside the great brick building of the American Can Company. Further on, passengers would be embarking and disembarking at the Eastern Steamship Wharf, seasonal residents from "Portland, Boston, New York, Phil'a and all points South and West." Just south of there was the bridge to Sodom, Eastport's gritty South End.

After lunch, Alice would drop Amy at the *Sentinel* before beginning the walk back to work. She passed by Oscar Brown's bowling alley where Luella Bleumortier from Grand Manan worked. Next to Edward Whalen's Dry Goods, where her older sister Mary liked to buy cloth, was Lillian Henderson's variety. Most days, Lillian was waiting outside to walk with Alice up over the hill and back to the North End.

The North End was the gateway to Eastport's vast cannery world, which had grown and shrunk and grown again ever since Julius Wolff of Wolff & Reesing, New York importers, produced the first can of sardines there in 1876.⁶ Lillian and Alice strolled past Booth Fisheries, Moses Pike's factory and the cannery of Hiram Blanchard & Sons, all alive with the bustle of hundreds of workers, screeching gulls and silvery herring being hoisted by the bucket from the briny holds of the sardine carriers docked at their wharves. Lillian always turned back before the clam factory, leaving Alice to walk the last stretch to Peacock's #2 alone.

The summer of 1938, the herring didn't come. In early June, Alice's step-mother Jesse was hanging clothes off her back doorstep on Shackford Street when she fell and broke her leg. Ira Boyden moved his wife's bed down into the living room and there she spent the summer in traction. Alice moved back home to care for her.

Joe had started running herring scales for the Mearl Corporation, which had a new plant in the middle of town.⁷ "I missed him. I'd be up home. I'd get mama and daddy's dinner ready and then I would run downtown because Joe would be coming in with his load of scales. Just to see him for a few minutes. Then he would go back up shore," she sighs.

In August, the herring finally began to appear. Alice went back to work at #2, but it was slow. She spent the days playing rummy in the office with Horace and Hattie, who had a new pastime: spying on the residents of the camps through the little window in the room that housed the barrels of oil.

The camps were a beehive of activity and not always of the desired sort. "Once she was looking out and somebody pushed somebody else out of the upstairs window of one of them! And then they pushed the bed out after them! Wild goes on," Alice recalled.

On Fridays, the factory owner, Carroll Peacock, would come over from Lubec in the *Casamaro* to bring the pay for #2's workers. If it was a cool morning, he would warm

his hands by the woodstove and then Alice would help him count out the pay packets. “We would spread the money out on the table. We had to have it just so. If we put two nickels in instead of a dime, it spoiled the whole thing. We had to have it exact. Then, they came to the door and everybody got their little packet of money.”

The slow days at #2 continued into the fall. From the window by the office door, Alice began watching a young woman who came out of a house down by the water each day to hang clothes. She daydreamed about the woman’s life, thinking how lovely it must be to be her, living in that little house. Much to her dismay, Alice later learned she was the one they called Black Duck, a woman of reported ill repute, and it wasn’t her house at all! She merely worked there. Black Duck lived in one of the camps.

One day when she was downtown, Alice ran into an old friend, Fanny, who was pushing a baby carriage. Fanny and her sister Lola, a famed beauty, were from Perry and had worked at Brooks Bluff the summer Alice worked there after high school. Fanny had since married a man from the South End and now she had a little boy. Alice stopped to admire the baby.

He was a handsome child, named John after his father, but he was seriously ill. Fanny hovered over him, explaining that the doctor had said the baby must be kept very still at all times. It was difficult to do, and she was clearly taxed, constantly coddling the child in an attempt to mollify him.

That year, the #2 team worked until the first of December, but there weren’t many fish even then. It was Alice’s last year at the cannery.⁸ The following summer, she gave birth to her own baby boy, Joseph, and began life as a young mother on Campobello Island.

Eventually, Hattie and Horace sold their Lubec home and moved back to Whiting. They bought a big white house on Whiting Corner, across from the pond. They were happy there. But sometimes Hattie would say wistfully, “Oh, if only I had my kitchen in Lubec.”

There wasn’t much in that old kitchen, recalled Alice, just a rocking chair, a stove. “But it had a great long pantry where the sink was, when she finally got it. It must have taken her a year to save up for it.”

¹ Friar’s Head is a rocky outcrop on one end of Friar’s Bay Beach in Welshpool, Campobello Island. In August of 1864, it was the target of practice shots by American troops from a battery on neighboring Treat’s Island. At the time, Campobello Island was under British possession and it caused an international incident. Islanders say the shots knocked the head off the Friar. The bluff was also the subject of the eponymous poem by Clara M. Arthur in *The Cherry-blooms Of Yeddo, And Other Poems*, 1881.

² In 1937, there were five weirs along Friar’s Bay: the Shag, closest to Friar’s Head, then Gough’s Beach weir, Allingham’s Upper, Allingham’s Lower and finally, closest to Welshpool Wharf, the Harbor Master. “As a rule, the small sea herring, used in the preparation of the Maine sardines, is caught in weirs, placed in comparatively shallow water along the shore. Most of the weirs are located in Canadian waters. In 1901, Bensley estimated that each season between 700 and 800 weirs operated for catching these fish under licenses issued by the Dominion Government. Prince, in an earlier report, stated that 95 percent of the American sardines are caught by Canadian fishermen. A weir is a large circular or heart shaped inclosure, made by driving stakes into the bottom of the sea, and intertwining brush between the stakes (F.C. Weber, *The Maine Sardine Industry*, 1921) .

³ R.J. Peacock Canning Company opened its first factory in Lubec on May 5, 1928. At its heyday, the company was once of the largest employers in the State of Maine.

⁴ Monel is a corrosion-resistant alloy of two-thirds nickel and one-third copper. It was an expensive alloy, with costs ranging from five to ten times that of copper and nickel. It was patented in 1906 by the International Nickel Co. During the world wars, it was used for U.S. military dog tags. It was supplanted by stainless steel after WWII.

⁵ Isadore Feltenstein was a Polish immigrant, who drove a taxi in Eastport for 55 years. Alice Gough knew him as Izzy Levin, supposedly for his step-father Max Levin, an Eastport merchant.

⁶ The first cannery for sardines was built at Eastport in 1875. During each of the succeeding years, one new cannery was added to the number so that in 1879, there were five in operation. In the spring of 1880, eight more were built at Eastport, and one each at Robbinston, Lubec, Jonesport, Lamoine, and Camden, making eighteen in operation in the State. By 1886 there were thirty-two canneries in operation at Eastport and the neighboring places. Along the coast, scattered from Cutler westward, there were thirteen others in operation, making forty-five canneries in Maine in 1886. . . In 1899, two companies were formed, known as the Seacoast Packing Company and the Standard Sardine Company, which included most of the canneries in Washington and Hancock Counties. The Seacoast Packing Company eventually absorbed its younger rival, and a number of the more antiquated plants were discontinued. Some of the canneries were fitted with new and improved machinery and were thus rendered more effective than formerly. Eleven plants at Eastport, owned by the Seacoast Packing Company, were not operated in 1902. This company was reorganized in 1903, and a greater number of its canneries were sold (Raymond McFarland, *A History of the New England Fisheries*, 1911). Seacoast Canning Co was the site of over 50 child labor photos taken by Lewis Hine in August of 1911.

⁷ The Mearl Corporation was formed in 1933 by Harry E. Mattin and Francis Earl of New York and Burton G. Turner of Eastport. It was located until fire destroyed the plant in 1947 at the current site of the Eastport breakwater on Water Street. The Eastport plant was the last remaining commercial pearl essence plant in the world when it finally closed its doors in 2007 (Edward French, *The Quoddy Tides*, January 12, 2007).

⁸ At the outbreak of WWII, the U.S. government contracted the Peacock Canning Company to provide sardines for the war effort. Until the end of the war, 88% of their total production went overseas. These government contracts led to a boom in the industry. At the end of the war, there were 52 sardine canning companies statewide, many of which closed their doors shortly after. "As the story goes, the British developed a 'canny liken' to a species of red fish, so the plant gave them that 'red look' by packing sardines in tomato sauce." Hank Stence, *Lubec Light*, April 18, 1996).

Notes on Contributors

Matthew Bernier lives in Pittsfield and works professionally as a civil engineer on environmental restoration, including restoring sea-run fish to historic habitat. He writes poetry mainly about love and conflict in nature. His work appeared previously in *The Catch* (Volume II).

Sally Bliumis-Dunn teaches Modern Poetry at Manhattanville College and at the Palm Beach Poetry Festival. Her poems have appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *PLUME*, *Poetry London*, *The Bellevue Literary Review*, *the New York Times*, *PBS NewsHour*, *Terrain*, *Upstreet*, *The Writer's Almanac*, *The Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-day*, and Ted Kooser's newspaper column, among others. In 2002, she was a finalist for the Nimrod/Hardman Pablo Neruda Prize. Her two books, *Talking Underwater* and *Second Skin*, were published by Wind Publications in 2007 and 2009, respectively. She recently moved to Harpswell.

Linda Buckmaster has lived within a block of the Atlantic most of her life. Her poetry, essay, and fiction have appeared in more than thirty journals, and one of her pieces was listed as a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays 2013*. She has produced collaborative work with artists of various media, and her monograph "Northern Run" with Book Artist Jan Owen is in the collection of the Center for Book Arts, University of Southern Maine. She has held residencies at Vermont Studios Center, Atlantic Center for the Arts, and Obras Foundation, among others. She teaches in the University of Maine System and has an MFA in Creative Writing from the Stonecoast program of the University of Southern Maine. She lives in Belfast.

Michael G. Dunn is a graduate of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Maine, where he works at the Fogler Library. He is the author of the poetry collection, *The Poet's Sanctuary*. He lives in Milford with his wife Terri and three young children.

Stephanie Gough is a daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of fishermen and cannery workers, and a writer from Campobello Island. She recently completed an MFA in Creative Nonfiction at the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her story "Hattie Bagley" is based on the memories of her grandmother, Alice Gough.

Jefferson D. Navicky's writing has appeared in *Hobart*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, *Serving House Journal*, *The Cafe Review*, and *Stolen Island*. He is an adjunct instructor of English at Southern Maine Community College, and lives in the woods outside Freeport with his wife, Sarah.

Mark Raymond grew up in Rockland and Owls Head, and teaches English at James Madison University. His work has appeared previously in *The Catch* (Volume III) as well as *Maine Times* and *Hanging Loose Magazine*.

Kim Roberts is the author of four books of poems, most recently *Fortune's Favor: Scott in the Antarctic* (Poetry Mutual, 2015). She edited the anthology *Full Moon on K Street: Poems About Washington, DC* (Plan B Press, 2010). Roberts is co-editor of the journals *Beltway Poetry*

Quarterly and the *Delaware Poetry Review*, and the web exhibit DC Writers' Homes. Find her at kimroberts.org.

Mattie Rodrigue is a graduate of Arizona State University with a degree in biological sciences. She is currently a graduate student at the University of Maine, earning dual master's degrees in marine science and marine policy. Her research involves a survey to estimate groundfish abundance and distribution in the eastern Gulf of Maine.

J.D. Smith's third poetry collection, *Labor Day at Venice Beach*, was published in 2012. A recipient of a Fellowship in Poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, he has had work in several genres appear in *The Bark*, *Boulevard*, *Dark Mountain*, *Grist*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Terrain*.

Peter Spectre is the author of multiple books about boats, boatbuilding, and the sea, including *A Mariner's Miscellany* and *A Passage in Time*. He is an editor with *Maine Boats*, *Homes & Harbors Magazine* and lives in Spruce Head.

Baron Wormser is a former Poet Laureate of Maine and the author of numerous books of poetry and prose. He currently resides in Montpelier, Vermont. His poem "An Island Romance" is taken from the collection *Unidentified Sighing Objects*.