



Night

We leave the open Bay behind us, coming into a circle of treelined shores at the mouth of the Chester River by twilight. We drop anchor, a few hundred yards from Virginia. Eastern

Neck is southwest of us, a light wind from near north (by midnight it'll be harder, colder, and closer to due north). Orion hangs just over the treeline, a winter constellation, glittering coldly bright. A spray of stars swings overhead, the only other light is a candle-

lantern pale marker light in the rigging, and a similar one far away in Virginia's. On a far treeline there are a couple of blinking red towers, a distant flash of green channel marker light, a smattering of single lights on the horizon, and the faint, distant glow of Baltimore, maybe twenty miles away. The crew finds their shoes, and sweaters, jackets, Carharts.

I dig out the tripod and the old bare bones Pentax (no electronics to fry, or batteries to go dead), heave it up on deck and point it at the stars. I shoot some time exposures from 15-80 seconds, enough range that some of the pictures should come out ok in this light, or lack of it. From somewhere below comes the hum, and vibration of a generator. I lie on one of the low varnished-wood





boxy things I don't know the proper name of, staring up at the sky.

Two shooting stars sail overhead.

The ship seems still as the space between thoughts. No slow swing of masts against background stars, Pride is caught between three elements; the earth she's anchored in, and wind and tide moving in opposite directions.

Or is she? The pictures emerge days later; a bit of Pride's rigging with a sweep of star streaks behind. Not the circling of the stars themselves across the sky: that would take much longer exposures. The star-squiggle I've captured is the quiet dance of Pride herself at anchor.

Virginia floats off our port bow, a low dark hull, a set of slender masts, and one faint light. The faraway

lights against the treeline could be campfires, candle lanterns in windows. Our own marker light glows the color of fire. No sound of the twenty-first century reaches us. We are two schooners, moored in another time.

Then some-

one uses the head.

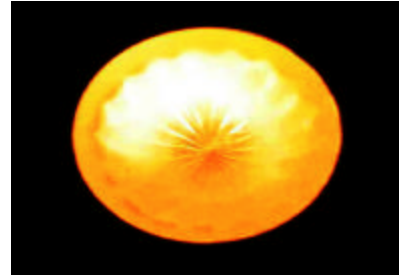
In Pueblo Indian legend, humans emerged from a dark Otherworld into this one through a hole, still echoed in the design of their kivas.





Dawn

The deck prism



In Celtic legend, the end of October was the end of that year. The next day began a new year, with new possibilities. The night in between belonged to no time. The veils between the worlds thinned.

In the creation story

of the Haudeenosaunee (Iroquois), Skywoman falls through a hole in the sky into a world of water. Muskrat dives for a handful of earth, places it on Turtle's back, and a world is created.

glows warm. I find my Old Navy fleece, a windbreaker, grab a camera and climb the gangway ladder, emerging into a new world, a new year, surrounded by water, afloat in a tiny, self-contained world. Someone once told me that wooden

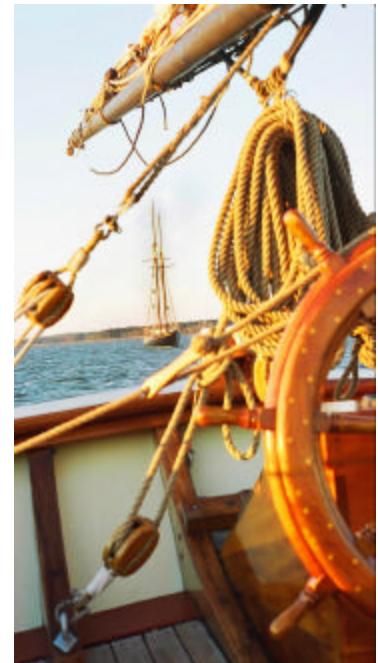




ships are warmer than steel ones. I pad across the deck in bare feet. They were right. Wooden ships are made of living things: tree and plant (even if some of

the lines now are synthetic). The pale deck is sanded wood, almost like suede, cool underfoot but not icy. Waves are all steel blue, Virginia is now riding off our

stern. I take some early morning camera shots. Try the one tai chi form I know on the subtly moving deck. The sun comes up, fiery, through the cannon ports.





Touches the topmasts, flows down.

Breakfast, Lu has cooked up some amazing stuff. It's her passion, her bliss. Not the end product, which is consumed, turned to energy and poop. It's the actual making of it. We have a long, philosophical discussion about this sort of thing. At one point Lu kneels on the floor, pries open the deckplate covering the pantry; this is what it's about, the considering of ingredients and mixing them and the making, the joy of doing it, the nurturing of the people who eat it.

Purpose, dharma, hero journeys, Joseph Campbell, follow your bliss. I brought a pirate T-shirt from one of my favorite

places, Chincoteague Island, it says "the journey is the destination". On a kayaking expedition to the River, another kayaker saw it and smiled. He talked about his own crew of kids, kayaking, always asking, "are we there yet, are we there yet?"

Not understanding yet that it isn't about the destination.

The destination is not Chestertown, a few miles up the river, and all too close now, but the squeegeeing of gunnels, the watching of sunrise over the sailshape of the aquarium or the treelines of Eastern Neck, roaring on a reach, the taste of brie on fresh-baked bread, a pink Jesus on a yellow engine,

peering into the depths of the bilge, the slow swing of stars through rigging, the arc of bright meteors across the shadow of raking masts, the glow of a deck prism in the dark.

The Journey, however short.

Anchors Aweigh, How to Paint Gun Doors Underway in Wind, and the Dashboard of the Ranch Truck

A couple of the girls are doing a really strange dance on deck. It involves bouncing up and down a lot and slapping heels with hands. When I inquire about this strange sailing



Billy Blanks could add it to his tai-bo tapes and make another fortune. The bar on my side, under the gentle persuasion of Pride's female crew, whips up (well over my head) and down with the manic energy of a heavy metal drummer. I lose it completely when it ricochetes over my head and out of reach.

Then some goober happens with the anchor chain and it jams. Grumble grumble grumble... With some heaving and hauling, this is remedied, and we go back to the teeter-totter. This time I get on the higher side of the deck (forward, toward the bow). It's a workout, even with four or five people on one side heaving it up and down.

I have a bigger appreciation for the guys who lived this life in 1812, and for the skill of the men and women who live it now.

tradition someone says it would be bad to pull a muscle so early in the day.

Oh yeah, we have to pull up the big whopping piece of iron that's still mired in the goo at the bottom of the Bay.

There's a sort of chin level teeter-totter thing

at the bow (don't get your head above it, I am warned), a bunch of the guys end up on one side of it, and the girls on the other. We begin shoving it up and down at an insane rate of speed: it hauls up the anchor chain. This better than anything at Gold's Gym,



The anchor perches for a moment on the side of the ship while the goo, and small lifeforms embedded in it, are hosed off, then it is hauled up on the gunnels and made fast.

There are two anchors, giving the bow beautiful bi-lateral symmetry. It would not only look odd, if there were only one, but the ship would list anchorward.

It never occurred to me, until now, to ask why there are two. *Do you ever use both?*

I get the polite sort of look that masks reactions to questions with obvious answers. Still, the question is cheerfully answered.

If you drop both anchors, your boat tends to rip apart.

However, if you lose one anchor, you have a



spare. In days of yore, there were any number of situations (sneaky nighttime attacks, the sudden

appearance of a British warship under inconvenient circumstances) where you might have to “cut the ca-





bles", lose your anchor and run.

We motor up the Chester River into the wind. The twisting, narrow channel makes sailing under good wind conditions tricky, this is definitely a time to offer supplications to the Guardians of the Diesel Power. (Our ancestors would have just dropped

anchor, and waited for the wind to change, unfortunately, tall ships today have to run on schedule, and the wind doesn't).

I'm peering over the edge, watching the waves roll by.

Then the motion changes. Rather, our motion forward ceases.

Some of the crew have looks of minor consternation.

"Did we just...?"

Run aground, yes. We are not moving. We have followed in the wake of many a Chesapeake explorer and fallen victim to the shifting sandbars, mud and gooey shoals.

At least we don't have to man the boats and pull her out of the mud.

The hindmost bit of Pride's sloped keel drags first, but then the rest levels out and gets stuck too. Pride rootches around with her engines and quickly pries herself loose. There is a depth finder in the keel, it is adjusted to read the actual depth under the lowest part of the keel. Still, it's the Bay.

Ship happens.

The great big ensign: the fifteen star flag with its field faded to sky blue, proves unwieldy and is replaced by a smaller ensign. Cameron and I haul it below and try to remember the Proper Folding of Flags. It looks wonderful aloft, and not particularly large against the mighty tree-tall masts. Hauled below, we realize its true size; it reaches from one end of the main salon





to the other. I think it's about the size of Sae Hrafn's mainsail.

We put travel time to good use, prettying up the ship for her arrival at Downrigging Weekend. Sarah sands and varnishes a few of the wood surfaces, the rest of us go to work on some of the paint.

We're painting a ship, underway, in chop, and wind.

"Don't get any black paint on the parts that aren't black."

Pride is mostly black on the outside of the hull. Very little of Pride is black on the inside. I am on the inside. At this moment, the gun doors (wooden doors that lower over the cannon muzzles) are raised so their

black bits are facing me (and the polished wooden gunnels, and the pale unvarnished highly absorbent deck). I know paint. I'm an artist, I spend a lot of time with paint. I've painted my share of walls and cars and other objects as well.

I have never painted a ship, underway, in wind.

I do not want to be the yahoo who spills a gallon of black paint on Pride's deck, right before the Big Event.

We sand, scrape, and apply some chemical I can't remember the name of (it inhibits rust). We wipe the gun doors off, and ready the paint. This involves going to part of the Underworld of the ship which the public never

sees, the bits I came to think of as the Dashboard of the Ranch Truck.

I once aquired a jokebook (in Texas, I think) about ranch life. It claimed "the ranch truck is superior to all other trucks because the dashboard can hold 500 pounds of Good Junk". I know people with Ranch Trucks, even in Pennsylvania. You can probably find anything you need, for any given situation, on those dashboards.

Pride has two: the lazarette and the forepeak. These are the oddball ends of the ship which collect, like a dashboard, Good Junk. Paint, varnish, ripped T-shirts, brushes, buckets, tools, something that looks like a wire toothbrush... "I



light boxes, narrow wooden platforms just above my head, on the shrouds, that hold lights. Megan is perched above, scraping and painting as if she were on a ladder on solid land. She has produced a useful invention: a paint can to hold the cup of black paint (surrounded by rags), dribble proof, with a wire bucket style handle. I learn the lines belayed on the pinrail are sturdier than they look. I can put my feet on the gunnels, and lean against a line, like a weird vertical

need a wire toothbrush". It is produced. "Sandpaper..." "what grit grade?" The "dashboards" are in high contrast to the polished wood and acres of canvas, but they hold the essentials that keep the ship, well, shipshape.

I wriggle into something like an almost comfortable position, carefully scraping excess paint off my brush before scrubbing it onto a gun door. Sarah is over the side, perched on one of the snowboard sized channels, inches above the waves roaring by, applying black paint.

My kayaking instructors carved the idea into my head that if you are on the water Thou Shalt Be in A PFD... and a wetsuit if water temperature plus air temperature don't add up to 100.

Sarah, sans pfd, is as blithely at home as a squirrel in a tree.

I manage not to apply paint to the varnished gunnels, the yellow side of the raised gun doors, or the pale velvety deck. I do apply plenty to myself. Later, I make an attempt on the





hammock, perch there and paint. Some lines are tighter than others, some give a bit more. It's oddly comfortable.

I can feel the wind singing through those lines. The whole rig, spars and lines, is picking up the wind song, even as we motor up-river against current and wind.

Lunch is brie and fresh bread and pasta and salad. All too soon the treelines and isolated country homes of the river bank give way to Chestertown proper. We announce our arrival with the boom of Pride's cannon.

Later, I hear a story that Sultana is prohibited from firing her cannons within a certain distance of town proper. It seems cer-

tain dog owners complained that Muffy, in startlement, was soiling the couch.

Probably anyone with a Lab had a different problem...a dog ricocheting off the walls going "Where's the duckWhere's the duckWhere's the duck? Gotta be a flippin' huge duck!"

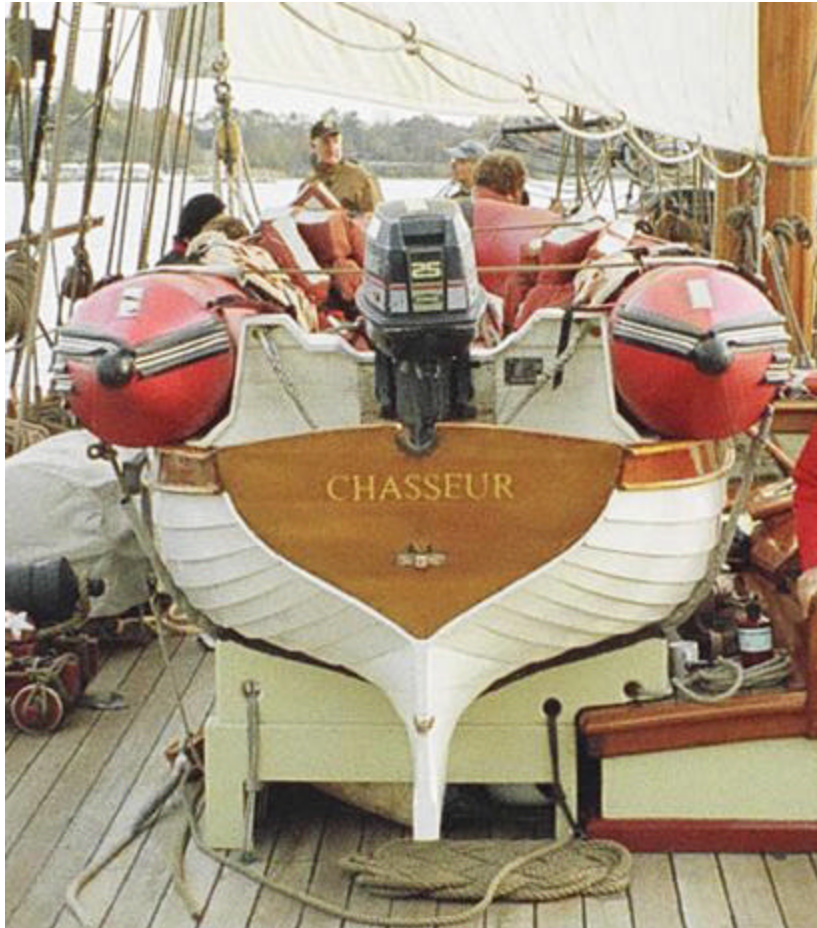
The first thing that happens as we dock is Marina Guy comes out and says "you can't park that here..."

The Captain is in the process of parking, and issues a polite but firm announcement that he will talk to Marina Guy when he is done parking.

Marina Guy vanishes. The issue (involving small boats now blocked by Pride and Sultana) is, eventually, peaceably resolved without cannon fire.

(The bowsprits of Sultana and Kalmar form a magnificent arch under which a smallish boat could pass.)

Duly docked, we must lower the Ship's Boat. First, we have to raise it. Last year, working on a story of mine, I ran into a scene where someone has to lower a boat off a similar ship. I was under the mistaken impression there would be some kind of divvy, daveyjones, davits or something. What actually happens is you sling the boat from the rigging. (I'm



still a bit foggy on the precise bit of rigging). In this case, we are lowering the red Zodiac (stowed on top of Chasseur). Several people man lines, a couple of us crawl up on higher deck bits and shove on the rubber sides of the Zodiac. It swings out, is maneuvered.

All comes to a screeching halt. Crewman in Charge grumbles something about the line being slung the wrong way. Zodiac returns to cradle in Chasseur. Lines are rearranged. Zodiac once more takes flight. We shove it across the deck in mid-air, then lower it over the side. I run alongside with a small fender, trying to keep the Zodiac off Pride's woodwork. For awhile, the red

boat is suspended in midair, while one of the crew does an amazing bit of acrobatics while fiddling with lines and fastenings; spread-eagled like a skydiver, feet on Pride's sides, hands on the lines holding up the Zodiac.



Walking the Plank

All too soon it is time to return to land. I have mo-

tored out of sight of land, on dive trips, twice. I have spent two days paddling the inside of Assateague Island (landing at campsite, and shallows, and random islet). This is the longest I have ever been on the water without touching land. I collect my gear, breaking it down into two packages; cameras in one yellow dry-bag, survival gear in the backpack. Lu and Rebecca help lug gear up to dock. Pride doesn't have her gangway out yet, and I pause, wondering howthe-heck I'm getting off the ship. There are several feet of water between me and the dock.

The girls demonstrate the art of running across the crossed springlines (the heavy docklines), to the dock.

Riiiiiiight.

I am not gonna be the weenie who asks for a gangplank.

I climb over the gunnels, get a death grip on the shrouds, perch on the channels. With only a little help from outstretched hands, I walk the tightrope to shore.

Downrigging

The van is where I left it. The campground is where I remember it from last year. The tall ships have come to Chestertown for Downrigging weekend: a floating timeline, lined up down the waterfront from 1607 to the 20th century. There's the great blue wedding cake (1630s): Kalmar Nyckel with its towering masts and fighting tops and carvings in every corner. Pride (1812) and Sultana



port to starboard: Kalmar, Sultana, Pride and the other tall ships at Chestertown MD

(1768), with raked masts and topsail yards like sword blades, gold and black in the lowering sun. The pilot schooner Virginia (early 20th century) in her dark colors, the puny Lady Maryland (19th/20th century) in her sunset pink and pine green. The skipjacks Stanley Norman and Elsworth, their sails furled on their long booms. The oyster buy boats Annie D, Mr Jim, Mildred Belle (mentioned in "Beautiful Swimmers"). And the doughty little shallop (1607) that explored 1500 miles of the Bay in John Smith's wake.

I wait till dusk and shoot shots of the ships, uplit, at anchor, along with a line of other photographers with fancier equipment.

But how many of them got to come here on a

ship? A "pirate ship", some of them would say. I've heard people passing Sultana say "look at the pirate ship". I could tell them a little something about their "pirate ships", but not too much. I've caught a glimpse of life on a privateer. Whether she sailed in the last millenium or this one, it would take a couple of lifetimes to learn it all.

The next day, all the ships sail down the Chester, twice. I catch a ride on Sultana in the morning, and the skipjack Stanley Norman in the afternoon. I blow film and memory card space: trying to catch Kalmar Nyckel and Virginia, and Lady Maryland and Pride, the skipjacks, the oyster buy boats, the shallop, and a stray Hooper Island Draketail as they swirl around us.

Sultana seems tiny, pony-sized after two days on Pride. But she has her own charms, her own mission within the realm of the Bay. She and the Stanley Norman, and the others, will carry people, especially kids, out into the great waters of the Bay, pulling up gooey, weird alien things from the bottom, learning what has vanished from the Bay that John Smith saw, seeing what's still there to save. They'll hear the boom of cannons, and the echoes of history, alive and breathing and rolling under their feet. They'll be hauling on lines, manning the helm, hearing the fwooooooomph! of canvas wings spreading overhead...

...and asking "when can we do it again?"





