

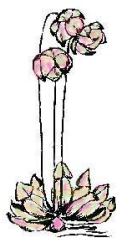


A CENTURY OF CLOSE CALLS

Tor Fosnæs

**A CENTURY OF CLOSE CALLS:
the seagoing lives of three sailors**

Tor Fosnæs



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CLOSE<i>i>CALLS

This memoir is dedicated to all seafarers past, present and future; here, there, and everywhere; to the hundreds and hundreds of men and women with whom I have been on ships; to the captains and the officers who kept their cool and kept their ships safe and comfortable through everything.

Fosnæs, Tor, author

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SEA FEVER

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way, where the wind's like a whet-
ted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

John Masefield

We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail
or to watch - we are going back from whence we came.

John F. Kennedy

Ocean is more ancient than the mountains, and freighted with the memories
and the dreams of Time.

H. P. Lovecraft

A woman's heart is a deep ocean of secrets.

Gloria Stuart

Being out there in the ocean, God's creation, it's like a gift He has given us to
enjoy.

Bethany Hamilton

Introduction

Anyone who goes to sea, no matter the reason, must accept that the sea, the ocean, is a cold, remorseless, sudden killer. The ocean will kill you between heartbeats. So you go to sea with the idea that the vessel, the crew, the systems will protect you as much as possible. Yet, you still spend every waking moment looking over your shoulder, making sure things haven't slipped out of control, and you are as prepared for the unexpected as best you can be.

At the start of my offshore experience in the late 1970's we all had the idea it was dangerous and deadly. We joked about how the money was big because we were all likely to die. Before the *Ocean Ranger*, the oil patch was wide open with few if any safety rules or procedures. Afterwards, many rules and procedures later, being on the open ocean is still fraught with danger and death.

Perhaps, you, gentle reader, will read a paranoid disturbance in my character as a result of those opening paragraphs, but I admit most of my sea days were benign and pleasant. God, I often say, made boats so men could enjoy beautiful, calm days on the ocean.

Thirty-five years after I started going to sea I write this because I spent nearly 25 years going to sea and being acutely aware of how precarious life at sea can be. My grandfather was a seafarer, a captain and a WWI veteran, my father was a sparks who lived through WWII on ships in the Pacific and the two Atlantics (north and south).

I prepared my grandfather's story a number of years ago as a dedication to the book, *Where Once They Stood: a gazetteer of abandonment*. My father's story results from recently being in receipt of his passport and radio-telegrapher's license returned from his home in England on the death of my stepmother in 2014; he died in 2004. My own stories have been told and retold until they are as recitations.

The Internet is a wonderful thing, and being able to trace my father's service on four Norwegian merchant navy vessels from 1940 to 1945 was something that wouldn't even be possible 20 years ago without extensive travel and tedious documentary research, the Internet means someone else did the work. My grandfather's story is mostly

from his lips and some paper records that came from him to me, and some new ones from the Internet.

My grandfather went to sea from 1905, as a captain from 1913, until 1946 with some lacunae; my father from the fall of 1939 to the fall of 1945 and me from 1979 to 2012, with several lacunae. What struck me in reflection was how there was a constant threat of death in all our experiences, both from the ocean in and of itself and, in the case of my father and grandfather, from war, in particular submarines. In my case, from the sea itself and from the logistics of getting to and from, on and off ships.

Amazingly we survived everything, as we all three agreed in various conversations, through sheer, simple good luck. There is a favourite story about Lady Luck (or Dame Fortune). It seems a weary traveller was forced to sleep on a narrow mountain path, with a drop of thousands of feet on one side and an equally high cliff on the other. Curled up in his cloak, asleep, Lady Luck happened by and said to herself, "Imagine if this poor fellow were to roll over in his sleep and fall to his death they would say it was me that did it." And, because she couldn't stand being blamed for something she didn't do, she went up to him and pushed him over.

Of course stories about near misses aren't necessarily interesting without some information about the people to whom they happened and the reasons for them being in the face of danger and disaster in the first place. So, what follows tries to flesh out the characters by placing them in a context of their times and places.



Cape Ballard, Southern Shore, August 2014, near
Cape Race, it is the site of many wrecks – personal photo

Mobile, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2014

Captain Alfred John Sinclair



Jack to his closest friends and family, was born in Upper Rocky Brook or Gin Cove Head (now part of Monroe), Smith Sound, Trinity Bay on 25 July 1894. He was the fifth son and seventh child of Joseph and Christina (Stone) Sinclair. His siblings were Edward, William, Maud, Mary, Charles, Emanuel, Patience, Maxwell and Anastasia (Babe).

The Sinclair family summer fished at Red Bay, Labrador, and operated a sawmill, started by Captain Sinclair's grandfather, Charles Sinclair in 1871, at Monroe, in the winter. Captain Sinclair

made his first trip to Labrador in 1905, at 11 years old. He finished Grade Three, but went on to obtain his Foreign Going Masters Ticket in 1913, when he was 19 years old. Self-educated, he was an excellent dead reckoning navigator and sailed until 1946.

During World War I he served in the Merchant Service as a Mate and Captain. He was sunk off Portugal and England three times in five days in 1917. After the War he returned to the salt fish trade making annual trips to the Mediterranean with salt fish and returning with salt and to the West Indies and the Caribbean bringing back rum, molasses, and sugar.

He married Beatrice Mary Harding of Greenspond, Bonavista Bay, in 1921 and set up house on Gear Street, St. John's. He was the father of Donald (1924), Nina Marie (1926), and Ralph Edgar (1928) who was born in Detroit. During a downturn in the fish trade in 1927, and after they were nearly lost with the *Retraction* in 1926, he and Max joined their brother William, a general building contractor, in Detroit.

He returned in 1930 as captain and owner of the *Winnifred E. Lee*, a two masted schooner built in Baine Harbour, Placentia Bay. Max returned later, gave up the sea, and went on to be a Newfoundland construction foreman until he retired in his eighties.

Captain Sinclair retired from the schooner trade in 1936, when he sold the *Winnifred E. Lee*, to enter the Newfoundland Customs Service as Captain of the *M.V. Shulamite*, patrolling mostly on the South Coast of Newfoundland, a known area of smuggling operations into Canada, the United States, and Newfoundland from the French possessions St. Pierre and Miquelon. He took part in many official tours during these years, including annual tours of Newfoundland and Labrador by the Governor and high ranking church officials. It was on one such trip, in 1937 that he was credited with winning the Battle of Bonne Bay. In late 1939, Captain Sinclair was seconded to the Royal Canadian Navy Reserve with the rank of Lieutenant Commander and posted to St. John's as a Navy pilot. He retired from active service in 1946.

Captain Sinclair built a retirement home in Chamberlains, Conception Bay, in 1948, and took up boat building and finish carpentry. He built two 10 metre, Dragon class, sail boats for Robert Murphy and Robert Coleman between 1952 and 1954 and turned out a full range of smaller wooden boats. In 1995 Robert Murphy's sailboat was seen on the slips at Long Pond getting some replacement planks put in her hull. Robert Coleman's boat went adrift from her moorings in Conception Bay in 1959 and was wrecked near Topsail Beach. He was famous for the small plywood prams he turned out regularly as well as homemade water skis, furniture, and his detailed boat refurbishments. His boat building skills included cutting the timbers, knees, keels, and ribs he needed himself, carefully picking each tree. This attention to detail was also evident in his 1/50 scale model of the Retraction built from Honduras mahogany and teak. Each rigging block was made by hand; each piece of standing and running rigging was turned by hand using a small hand turned drill that he perfected. He sewed the sails himself and filed the anchors from blocks of copper. When he discovered he couldn't find the right sized chain for the anchors, he appropriated one of Beatrice's gold chain and installed it. The model sits in its oak and glass case at his son Don's house in Chamberlains.

Captain Sinclair had a rare blood type (AB-) and he was often called on by St. John's hospitals to make direct transfusions; the call would come and off he'd go in an ambulance. In later life he developed geriatric diabetes and was put on a strict diet. No more salt beef fat (which he said he liked more than the meat); no more gravy; no more chicken skin. He was heard to mutter that one day he was going to get "a big piece of salt meat and a big, fat chicken, cook it all up, eat it all up, and go to hell on a full stomach".


Captain Sinclair never believed man landed on the moon. He called himself "the biggest liar in Trinity Bay", which was borne out by his never-ending yarns about halibut nests and such. He soaked his feet in old leather boots filled with goose grease for the rheumatism in his ankles; he believed in the curative powers of burned transformer oil for arthritis; he could put away warts; he loved dogs and cats; he took Dodd's Kidney Pills and Carter's Little Liver Pills; and slept in flannel nightshirts.

He died while taking an afternoon nap on 16 October 1971 at 77 years old. Beatrice died of complications of Alzheimer's disease 26 May 1972 at 77 years. Both are buried in General Protestant Cemetery, Topsail Road, St. John's, alongside Beatrice's parents (Augustus and Mary Ann Harding), and their son Ralph, who died 17 April 1987.

THREE TIMES Torpedoed by Germans - Crew of 'Rose Dorothea' Were on Three Ships Sunk by Huns Capt. Hamilton of Mayola Drowned in Bristol Channel - facsimile of a 1917 newspaper article

Capt. W. Bradbury, R. Richardson, R. Wilcox, and J. St. Clare, master and part of the crew of the schr. Rose Dorothea, owned by Messrs. Campbell & McKay, which was sunk by a German submarine off the coast of Portugal early in February, arrived in the city by express last night. These men have had, perhaps as much experience with German subs, as any who have followed the sea since the outbreak of the war, as they have the record of having been on three different ships that were sent to the bottom by the Huns. The Rose Dorothea left here on Dec. 31st with a cargo of codfish for Europe. The weather was excellent during the run across and the passage was made from here to Gibraltar in good time. Arriving at the "Rock" Capt. Bradbury received orders to proceed to Oporto to discharge his fish and the vessel arrived there in due course. The cargo being discharged, the next move was to Cadiz to take a load of salt, and it was

on this run that the Rose Dorothea met her doom. The greater part of her run from Oporto to Cadiz was completed, Cape St. Vincent having been rounded, when the German got in his work. The crew had just enough time to scramble into their boats when their vessel was sent to the bottom. They were, of course, left to the mercy of the winds and waves, but fortunately the weather was very moderate and the vessel's boat was equal to the occasion. After a few hours they were sighted by a schooner, which proved to be the Lunenburg vessel Mayola, also from St. John's, with a cargo of codfish shipped by the Smith Co. They were taken on board and warmly welcomed by Capt. Hamilton and crew, who reported seeing nothing of submarines, but the Mayola was destined soon to get her share of what was going, for the crew of the Rose Dorothea had not been on board her two hours when, without any warning whatever, she was blown up. Again the men had to take to the boats, this time in even a greater hurry than in the case of the sinking of the other vessel, and again they were adrift on the broad ocean. The boats at once started for the nearest land, which was about fifteen miles distant and after many hours hard rowing they reached Tagos on the south coast of Portugal. From here the two crews went to Lisbon and took passage with hundreds of other men of different vessels and steamers which had been sunk, their destination this time being Falmouth, England, and the ship by which they sailed being the royal mail packet steamer Drina, a ship of 11,484 tons gross and 9,855 tons nett, built in 1913. The voyage was uneventful until near the end, but when the Drina was in the mouth of Bristol Channel, the diversion in the shape of another underwater boat, came. The time was midnight and most of those on board the Drina, the number of passengers alone being nearly five hundred, were comfortably asleep. Without any previous warning a terrific explosion occurred and it was quickly realized what had happened. Men rushed to the deck half clad and the boats were quickly got out. Confusion was avoided as well as possible and eventually all the ship's company were adrift in the boats. The crew of the Rose Dorothea were beginning to think that they were destined to spend the remainder of their days being sent adrift by Germans and of their three experiences the last was the worst by a long way. With scarcely any clothing on they were pierced by the stinging wind and biting frost. For three or four hours the boats were adrift but were picked up at daylight by a trawler. Unfortunately all the boats had not survived and amongst those of the Drina's company who had met a watery grave was the master of the Mayola, Capt. John Hamilton, tho the others of the crew were safely landed and brought to Liverpool. Capt. Hamilton was a Carbonear man and had been in the Ford River, which was also lost, before taking command of Mayola. He was a brother of Mesdames Chas. McCarthy and Peter Keough and of Mr. Michael Hamilton of Carbonear.

Name	Rose Dorothea
Type	Sailing vessel
GRT	147 tons
Country	 British
Built	1905
Builder	?, Essex, Massachusetts
Operator	W. Campbell & J. J. McKay, St. John's, Newfoundland
History	Wooden schooner.

U-boat attacks on Sailing vessel Rose Dorothea

	Date	U-boat	Loss type	Position	Location	Route	Cargo	Casualties
1	16 Feb 1917	U 21 (Otto Hersing)	Sunk	Stopped and sunk 15 miles off Cape Santa Maria	36° 50'N, 8° 25'W	St. John's, Newfoundland - Oporto	codfish	0
Location also given as 30 miles SE of Cape St. Vincent								

Name	Mayola
Type	Sailing vessel
GRT	146 tons
Country	 British
Built	1910
Builder	W.A. Naugler, Bridgewater, Nova Scotia
Operator	E.C. Weutzel, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia
History	Wooden schooner.

U-boat attacks on Sailing vessel Mayola

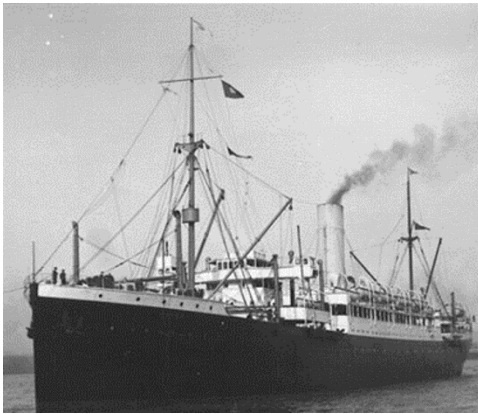
	Date	U-boat	Loss type	Position	Location	Route	Cargo	Casualties
1	16 Feb 1917	U 21 (Otto Hersing)	Sunk	Stopped and scuttled 50 miles SE of Cape St. Vincent	36° 53'N, 8° 26'W	St. John's, Newfoundland - Oporto	codfish	0

Name	Drina
Type	Passenger steamer
GRT	11,483 tons (one of the largest ships hit)
Country	 British
Built	1913
Builder	Harland & Wolff, Ltd., Belfast
Operator	Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, Belfast

U-boat attacks on Passenger steamer Drina

	Date	U-boat	Loss type	Position	Location	Route	Cargo	Casualties
1	1 Mar 1917	UC 65 (Otto Steinbrinck)	Sunk	Mined 2 miles W of Skokham Island	51° 41'N, 5° 20'W	Buenos Aires - Liverpool	passengers & general cargo	15

uboat.net/wwi/ships_hit/ pages on the *Rose Dorothea*, *Mayola* and *Drina*; the site notes that 103 Allied ships above 10,000 tons were sunk, *Drina* is 31 in the list; the largest was the hospital ship *Britannic* at 48,158 tons



Drina (11,434 tons) - taffthehorns.com photo

Michael Lowrey [mlowrey@in-fionline.net] wrote: “ROSE DORETHEA and MAYOLA were both sunk by scuttling charges (source: U 21's war diary) while DRINA was mined.” Capt. Sinclair’s service ribbons had three torpedoes pinned to them and he always said *torpedoed*.

The actual cause of the explosions certainly didn’t take away any of the dread and horror of those five days.

Loss of Vessel

The *Retraction* was a "tern" schooner. Three masted with an overall length of 119 feet, beam of 26 feet, and a draft of 11 feet, she was built in Conquerall Bank, Nova Scotia by the firm of J.N. Rafuse for Philip Templeman of Bonavista; she was a sister ship of the *Ricketts, V.C.* built in 1919 for William Forsey of Grand Bank and lost near Petit Bois Island, Miss., 26 August 1921. Rafuse built five terns on the *Retraction* and *Ricketts, V.C.* model in 1919, and the *Retraction* and two others in 1920. See *Sails of the Maritimes* by John P. Parker, M.B.E., Master Mariner (Parker, 1960) for details regarding the three and four masted schooners built in Canada and Newfoundland between 1859 and 1929.

Captain Sinclair unofficially held the fastest sailing record between St. John's and Belize, British Honduras, 26 days down and back, set in the *Retraction* in 1924.

Returning from Cadiz with a load of salt, the *Retraction* suffered heavy weather about 380 miles southeast of Cape Race. Broken and adrift for six more days she was abandoned about 600 miles further southeast. His crew included his brother Max, Mate; Seamen Abner Brennan, Samuel Chapland and Max House; and Cook S. Steeds, all from Fortune Bay.



Retraction entering Bay of Naples, 1923, watercolour by unknown Neapolitan dockside artist – in my possession

Rescued by a British oil tanker *S.S. El Oso* and taken to Curacao in the British West Indies, they were returned to New York on *S.S. St. Agnes* and from there to St. John's on the Red Cross liner *Rosalind*.

The first duty of a captain of a lost vessel, upon rescue, is to make a formal declaration of the incident. This facsimile is of a carbon copy typescript provided by the radio operator of the *El Oso* to Captain Sinclair. For 12 days he and his crew battled against the "perfect storm" of 1926. Privately he claimed he always knew the *Retraction*

was "weak in the keel" and blamed this fault on her eventual demise. His daughter Nina Marie was born on February 2 at Devon House, Duckworth Street, then the Templeman family home, where his family had taken refuge while awaiting news of the ship's fate as it was long overdue. He arrived back in St. John's on March 14.

Original Declaration of Loss of Vessel *Retraction*

FEBRUARY 6th 1926.

ON BOARD S.S. "El Oso"

This is to certify that I, John Sinclair, Master of the British Schooner "Retraction" of 148 tons nett, owned by Philip Templeman of St. Johns, Newfoundland, make the following declaration:-

On the 31st day of December 1925, I sailed from Cadiz, Spain, with a cargo of salt bound for Catalina, Newfoundland, passage was made south of the Azores and fair weather was met during the voyage until January 23rd 1926, weather gradually getting bad, with high seas and strong gales in North Westerly direction. It was now found that vessel was making a little water, and this was pumped every hour. Wind and sea continued to rise until January 28, when a strong gale was blowing from South West, increasing, and veering to West North west, during which time, the pumps were more and more necessary. January 29th. Vessel was now in Lat. 41-30 N. Long. 48.01 W. Wind increasing to storm, vessel laying to on starboard tack, very heavy weather at 10 p.m. sea breaking on vessel, smashing lifeboat in chocks, and causing deck to start. Pumps were now manned continuously. About 11.30 P.M. Sea broke on vessel causing her to go astern and rudder gave a severe crack. Noticed it was lifted about two inches and causing it to beat from side to side, having reason to think that top pintle was broken. Water coming in through rudder case in different places. Unable to keep rudder quiet by lashing wheel was compelled to keep vessel before wind and sea. vessel had now started to leak badly.

January 30th. Very high sea and storm of wind, vessel running with oil bags out to starboard and port bows, shipping heavy seas fore and aft, beat off several pieces of bulwarks to free decks. Was ~~necessary to lash men to wheel and pumps to enable them to continue their duties.~~

January 31st. Wind veering more North with strong gale, vessel running in South easterly direction.

February 1st. Wind moderating. At 8 a/m tried to lay vessel to, but finding rudder beating so badly compelled to keep vessel before wind and sea, as rudder appeared as if it would cause more damage. Vessel was now getting strained everywhere as oakum was coming out of seams fore and aft, also out of stern boards. Scarfs in rails were open, covering boards open, also butts in deck, and leaking badly. Salt going out of fore hatch. Vessel leaking about 700 strokes of pump per hour.

February 3rd. Decided to abandon vessel if any other ship came in sight, in mean time try to work vessel south into fine weather.

February 4th. Vessel reaching South with storm sail and two reefed mainsails, whole foresail and jumbo, making very little progress. Rudder working badly, from side to side, spars working in deck about two inches, bowsprit working badly in bollards. About twentyfive

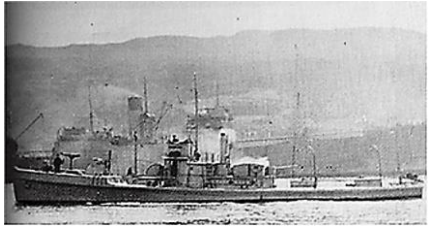
tons of tons of sail gone out of midship part of vessel, mostly on starboard side causing vessel to list to port. About 10:30 sighted a light to leeward, lights were made and vessel altered course and came towards us, proved to be the S.S. "El Oso". After calling out to the Captain telling him I want to abandon vessel and had no lifeboat. A boat was sent from the above vessel which took us off about 12:30 A.M. Before leaving vessel I set fire to her fore and aft. Position Lat. 33.06 N. Long 39.19 W. After getting on board the S.S. "El Oso" the lifeboat was abandoned owing to heavy sea, and personal effects of Master and crew, including Official Log Book were lost. When last seen the Schooner "Retraction" was ablaze and had a heavy port list.

Battle of Bonne Bay

In June 1937 Captain Sinclair, in command of the Government Cutter *MV Shulamite*, arrived in Woody Point, Bonne Bay with Newfoundland's chief welfare officer. The official was to meet with local men who were demanding work; in particular, they wanted the government to hire them to build a road from Bonne Bay to the newly emerging business centers of Deer Lake and Corner Brook. Many families were then living on the "dole" (6 cents a day). When the official refused their demands the crowd turned ugly and seized him, taking him captive and holding him in a house near the wharf.

Captain Sinclair, aboard the *Shulamite*, was made aware of the trouble when the mob turned on the *Shulamite* and threatened to "haul her ashore" to prevent her from going to Corner Brook, the nearest Newfoundland Ranger station. They gathered on the wharf and untied the *Shulamite*, passing the lines over the wharf to men standing on the road. As they tried to swing the vessel's bow around, preparing to haul her onto the beach, Capt. Sinclair made ready the engine and, at his command, when the *Shulamite* was heading straight at the beach, ordered "Full Astern!"

Men skidded over the wharf and off the road onto the beach as the *Shulamite* made her way astern, a few men tumbled off the wharf into the bay, and a few more, once in the water, refused to let go the lines. They were hauled over the railings, dried out, and kept prisoner until the *Shulamite* arrived in Corner Brook. When she returned with the Rangers the next morning, order was soon restored, the government man freed, and soon on his way to complete his tour, shaken but none the worse for his ordeal. Captain Sinclair said he wasn't concerned the crowd might have beached her given he had 3000 diesel horsepower at his command.



Some of the crowd greeting the *MV Shulamite* on her arrival in Woody Point, Bonne Bay, just hours before the Battle of Bonne Bay was engaged – family photo and as a Navy vessel in 1944; she foundered in Quebec in 1953 – RCN photo

Boat building

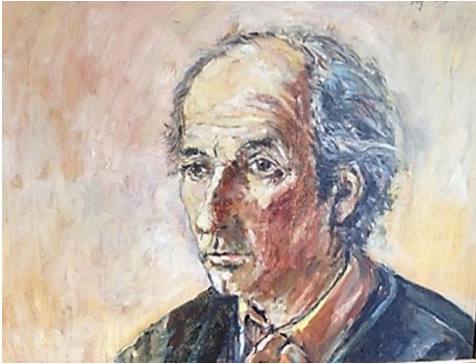


Captain Sinclair with his helper, grandson Tor Fosnæs summer 1952 and Robert Murphy's boat awaiting transport to Long Pond yacht club, fall 1952– family photos



Robert Murphy's boat off Long Pond, summer 1953 and Robert Coleman's boat in Conception Bay, 1955 – family photos

Knut Arnljot Fosnæs



Knut at 60, painted at his home by Gerald Squires, in Nottingham, England, 1981 – in my possession

Knut was born in Rjukan, Telemark, Norway, 08 October 1921 to Bjarne and Mally (Larsen). Bjarne was a railwayman who retired after the war as stationmaster at the ferry terminal on the Rjukan end of Lake Tinn, at that time the only access into the steep little valley which housed Norway's first hydro-electric generating station and the site of the occupying German's World

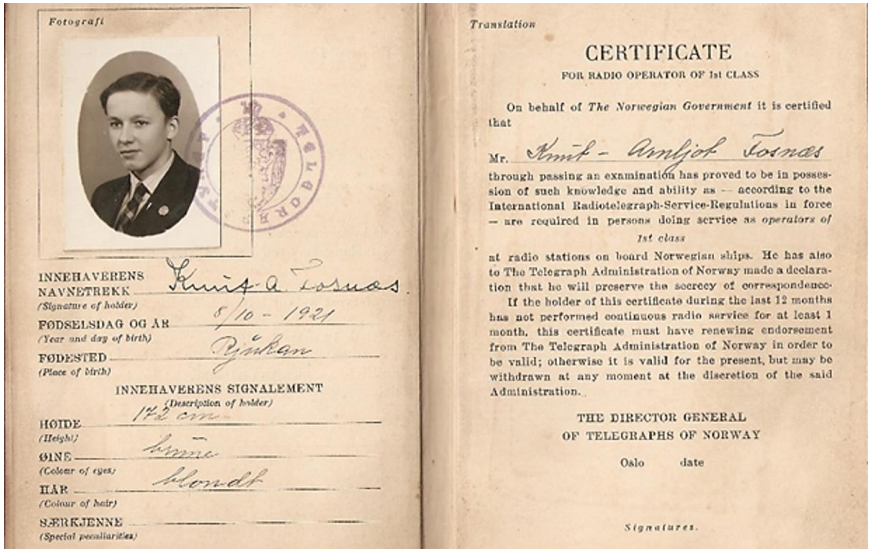
War II heavy water plant. Knut had a brother, Per, and a sister, Ruth, both older.

Knut left home immediately after graduating high school, he eschewed a plan to put him to work in a cousin's garment factory, and instead studied for and passed his radio-telegrapher's course and signed on to a whaler shipping out to Antarctica. The fleet (*Suderøy*, a factory ship, and several whale catchers) was to set out in the fall of 1939 and return the following spring. The fleet was in Antarctica when the Germans occupied Norway in April 1940.

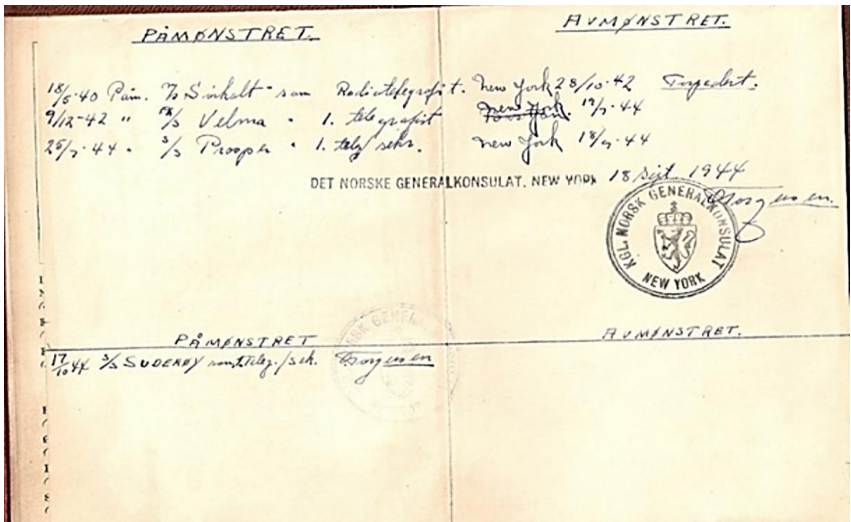
Norwegian ships all around the world headed for neutral ports for orders; a thousand ships and 10,000 sailors and officers were seconded into Nortaship, at the time the single biggest ship operating company in the world; Nortraship was a revised and renewed Norwegian merchant navy in exile. Many were torpedoed and/or sunk while in convoy or while sailing as independent operators.

In 1944 he was in New York and the Norwegian Consul there noted his wartime service into the back of his radio licence; what follows is based on that record. He mustered out of the merchant navy in August 1945, married Nina Marie Sinclair of St. John's, Newfoundland, whom he met in St. John's in 1942. They moved to Norway, where I

was born in February 1947. Knut tried to start his own business installing and repairing marine communications equipment after a short stint working for the international Marconi Company's branch in Bergen.



Picture ID and English language version of radiotelegrapher certificate



Inside back cover of Radiotelegrapher's certificate showing Knut's wartime Merchant Navy service record

After six years away, five in exile, he was instructed to do his National Service, at the time five years of military service was expected. He refused, was placed under house arrest and told he couldn't work. Nina took me and returned to Newfoundland, now Canada, in June 1949. Knut was sprung in early 1951 by a concerted effort of the International Red Cross and Canadian and Norwegian officials and he followed to Newfoundland where he lived for the next 20 years. He visited his Norwegian relatives in 1971 on the occasion of his 50th birthday, as a Canadian citizen.

He started with Canadian National Telegraphs as an installer in 1951; advanced to Manager of the CNT office in Twillingate, there installing the first dial telephone system. At Corner Brook as District Manager, in the late 1960's, and working from Woody Point, Bonne Bay, he implemented a new dial up telephone service for the Great Northern Peninsula. Unhappily married, and at odds with his bosses, he ran off to England with Glennis Cook; they married in 1979 and for 15 years he ran a neighbourhood greengrocer's shop in Nottingham. He joined the Unitarian Church and was a lay preacher.

His Radio Operator of 1st Class certificate was issued on 05 July 1939 when he was 17 years and 9 months old. It isn't clear now to which of the fleet he was assigned but it was probably the factory ship, the *Suderøy*. Her records show she went with some of her catchers to Hampton Roads, Virginia, still a neutral port at the time of the occupation. The *Suderøy* served throughout the war for the Allies and Knut was to return to her in 1944. In any case, on 18 May 1940 he was in New York and signed on to *Sørholt*, a merchant cargo vessel, outbound as an independent trader for the Pacific. Over the next 5 years, 2 months, 14 days he would serve on four Nortraships. To this must be added the nine months of the whaling fleet, meaning he was away from Norway for just shy of 6 years. He often referred to this as being in exile.

Knut had a photograph, taken in Rio de Janeiro, of a shipmate dressed up like an SS officer, complete with cigarette holder and monocle, which the shipmate wanted mailed home, hoping the Germans would allow it to be delivered once they saw the getup; he died in the sinking of the *Sørholt*.

The ships



Sørholt built at Kockums Mekaniska Verksteds A/B, Malmö, Sweden in 1939 for Skibs-A/S Igadi - 4801 gt, 2829 net, 9200 tdwt

***Sørholt* passages 18 May 1940 to 15 September 1942 [851 days; 2 years, 3 months, 29 days]**

Pacific trip 1 - 18 May 1940 to 4 October 1940: New York, Hampton Roads, Savannah, Georgia, Cristobal, Balboa [*Atlantic and Pacific ports of the Panama Canal*], Los Angeles, San Francisco, Manila, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Manila, Iloilo, Manila, Los Angeles, Balboa, Cristobal, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York

Pacific trip 2 – 5 October 1940 to 29 January 1941: New York, Cristobal, Balboa, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Manila, Shanghai, Manila, Cebu, Manila, Los Angeles, Balboa, Cristobal, New York

Atlantic trip 1 – 4 February 1941 to 16 February 1941: New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York

Pacific trip 3 – 16 February 1941 to 9 June 1941: New York, Cristobal, Balboa, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Manila, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Iloilo, Manila, Los Angeles, Balboa, Cristobal, New York

Pacific trip 4 – 12 June 1941 to 20 October 1941: New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, Savannah, Cristobal, Balboa, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Manila, Hong Kong, Manila, Los Angeles, Balboa, Cristobal, New York

[The battle for Hong Kong was waged between 08 and 25 December 1941; Pearl Harbour and the US entry into the war was 07 December 1941.]

Atlantic trip 2 – 23 October 1941 to 30 January 1942: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Hampton Roads, New York, St. Thomas, Rio de

Janeiro [undoubtedly Knut's favourite port of call, whether for the waitresses or the climate remains his secret; I still have a Cinzano corkscrew he was given by a waitress; he treasured it], Santos, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Santos, New York.

Atlantic trip 3 – 3 February 1942 to 31 May 1942: New York, Baltimore, Hampton Roads, New York, Trinidad, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Santos, New York

Atlantic trip 4 – 21 June 1942 to 29 August 1942: New York, Hampton Roads, Trinidad, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo, Buenos Aires (departed 29 August 1942), torpedoed and sunk 15 September 1942.

Knut often said he was torpedoed twice, but the ships' records show no other incident; he said the *Sørholt* sinking was the second. Perhaps the third torpedo was the second incident in his mind.

In the 1980's, by chance encounter with the nonagenarian Norwegian doctor who mustered him out of the merchant navy in New York in 1945, he was able to access his Norwegian Merchant Navy pension and, because the doctor who mustered him out was able to attest to his being irreparably damaged physically or psychologically as a result of his wartime experiences, he got a bonus.



Velma built 1930 by Götaverken Mek.Verk., Göteborg, Sverige for Skibs A/S Nordheim (H.Ditlev Simonsen & Co) - 9720 gt, 14780 tdwt

***Velma* passages 9 December 1942 to 19 July 1944 [588 days; 1 year, 7 months, 11 days]**

[*Velma* was an oiler for several trans-Atlantic convoys; while *St. John's* is not shown as a port in the records, convoy ships would gather in *St. John's* to begin the run across the Atlantic; in any case Knut was in *St. John's* on the *Velma* in 1942 at Christmas when he met *Nina Marie*. The ship's records have "missing voyages" for the period.]

Atlantic trip 1 – 13 December 1942 to 31 January 1943: New York, Clyde Anchorage, Bowling, Glasgow, Pd. out Tail of Bank, Clyde, New York

Atlantic trip 2 – 6 April 1943 to 14 May 1943: New York, Pd. out Tail of Bank, Clyde Anchorage, New York

Atlantic trip 3 – 30 June 1943 to 13 August 1943: New York, Loch Ewe, Cromarty, Invergordon, Clyde Anchorage, Pd. in Tail of Bank, Greenock, River Clyde, New York

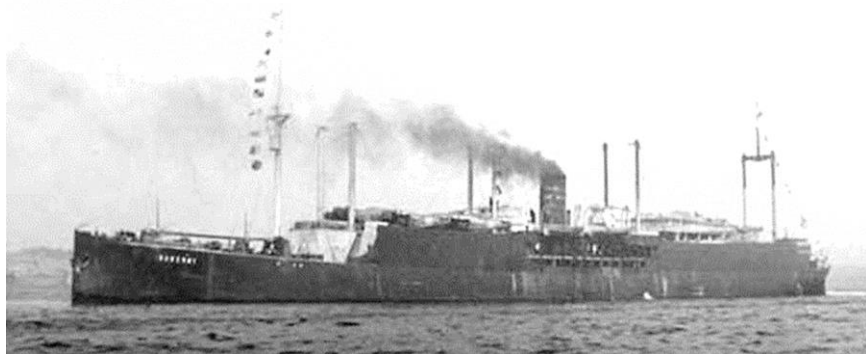
[The Tail of the Bank is the name given to the anchorage in the upper Firth of Clyde immediately north of Greenock and Gourock; Loch Ewe was used as an assembly point for the Arctic and Atlantic Convoys during World War II; Invergordon is a town and port in Easter Ross, in Ross and Cromarty, Highland, Scotland; Bowling is the location of the western terminus of the Forth and Clyde Canal, opened in 1790, and it is the western gateway to the Lowland canals. These locations were the termini for many Atlantic Convoys and the staging areas for the return trip to North American ports.]



Prosper built 1917 by Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co., Hong Kong for H. M. Wrangell & Co. A/S - 2232 gt, 1376 net, 3030 tdwt

Prosper passages 25 July 1944 to 18 September 1944 [56 days; 1 month, 25 days]

Atlantic trip 1 – 29 July 1944 to 10 September 1944: New York, Key West, New York, Key West, New York



Suderøy built 1913 by Whitworth & Co., Newcastle for P. Johannesen - 5857 gt., 3343 net, 11000 tdwt

***Suderøy* passages 17 October 1944 to 31 July 1945 [288 days; 9 months, 15 days]**

South Atlantic trip 1 – 17 November 1944 to 31 July 1945: New York, Guantanamo Bay, Aruba, Cristobal, Balboa, South Georgia, South Sandwich Island, South Georgia, Falkland Island, South Sandwich, South Georgia, South Sandwich, Balboa, Cristobal, Curacao, Cape Henry, Lynn Haven Roads, Curacao, Guantanamo Bay, New York, Curacao, Cristobal, Curacao, Cristobal, Curacao, New York, Halifax

[Cape Henry and Lynn Haven Roads are areas of Virginia. This trip contained much to-ing and fro-ing between the USA, and places governed by the US such as Guantanamo Bay and Cristobal; Curacao was a Dutch colony, a gateway to its neighbour Venezuela which was an important source of oil. Oil and whale oil were carried to maintain the US wartime efforts in Europe and the Pacific. By October 1944 the German U-boat campaigns had all but petered out in the South Atlantic and the last recorded action of the Battle of the Atlantic was early May 1945.]

The passport

The passport was issued, just three months before the occupation; as he was already at sea on the whaling fleet it must have been sent to him after the fact, possibly catching up with him in Hampton Roads or New York. It was stamped in Manila 6 August 1940, in Los Angeles-San Pedro 28 August 1940, in Manila 28 August 1941, at Rio de Janeiro 30 July 1942, in New York 17 August 1943 and Halifax 12 October 1945, again at Halifax 22 October 1945, and at Bergen 10 November 1945.

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SIGNALEMENT
DESCRIPTION
PERSONENSCHREIBUNG

Stilling Profession/Beruf *Radio-telegrafist*

Fødested og når født *Rjukan 8/10/1921.*

Lieu et date de naissance *Rjukan*

Place and date of birth *172 cm*

Geburtsort u. d. Tag *172 cm*

Høide / Taille / Height / Gestalt *172 cm*

Ansikt / Visage / Gesicht *ovalt*

Øinens farve / Couleur des yeux / Colour of eyes *brun*

Farbe der Augen *brun*

Hårets farve / Couleur des cheveux / Colour of hair *svart blond*


Farbe des Haares *svart blond*

Særlige kjennetegn / Signes particuliers / Special peculiarities / Besond. Kennzeichen *intet*

Hustru - Femme
Wife - Ehefrau

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Hustru - Femme
Wife - Ehefrau



Knut A. Fosnes

Passinnehaverens egenhendige underskrift
Signature du titulaire
Signature of Bearer
Unterschrift des Passinhabers

NSL 831

Hustruens egenhendige underskrift
et de sa femme
and of Wife
and of seiner Ehefrau

Besvidnes av den pånåttedende myndighet:
Attestée par l'agent délivrant le passeport:
Certified by the issuing Authority:
Bescheinigung der ausstellenden Behörde:

Fosnes

BARN - ENFANTS - CHILDREN - KINDER

Nom	Age	Kjønn
Name	Age	Sex
Name	Alter	Geschlecht

Passport issued by Rjukan Politikammer (police service) 24 January 1940

Renewed by the Bergen Politikammer 29 November 1949 (with a new picture) for travel in Europe; he attempted to come to Canada, getting as far as Grangemouth but was forced to return to Norway "at the earliest opportunity" from Newcastle-on-Tyne on 7 December 1949.

25 November 1949 the Bergen Politikammer renews the passport making it good for passage to the USA and Canada. 4 December the Canadian Legation in Oslo stamped the passport giving him "immigrant" status; he passed through Bergen 2 January 1951 to Tyne Ports 4 January 1951 and departed Liverpool 5 January 1951 landing in St. John's 14 January 1951.

Knut became a Canadian citizen 31 May 1957.

He became an ardent Newfoundlander on his arrival and was especially fond of the West Coast which he said was reminiscent of Norway. He was a founder of the Marble Mountain ski club in Steady Brook and in 1987 was the Winter Carnival Patron.

He greatly admired my grandfather, Captain Sinclair, who survived being sunk three times in five days in World War I, which always struck Knut as an amazing stroke of good luck. That they were both sailors while still teens was another mutual admiration bond between them.



Renewed passport of 1949 showing it was limited to “all countries in Europe”; later amended to include Canada and the USA

A sailor’s legacy

I started going to sea at 32 in 1979 and continued to do so for 25 years; I have two long trips of more than 100 days; several at 70 to 90 days, and innumerable of the 14 to 30 day variety. I have sailed to 72 North around Point Barrow, Alaska, to 72 south in the Weddel Sea, Antarctica, and 76 north in Melville Bugt, off west Greenland. I’ve sailed past South Georgia and the South Shetlands, and been ashore in the Falkland Islands and Punta Arenas, Tierra del Fuego, Chile. I never thought of myself as a sailor until I was at it for a number of years. I discussed this with my father in the early 1990’s and he agreed that the sailing life was greatly seductive and very difficult to give up.



Passport pages showing his Canadian Immigrant status and his exit from Norway to Canada (right)

Realizing now that his sailing life was just six years long it is remarkable how readily he could be identified as a sailor. He rolled with a sailor's walk, and, like me, his speech was peppered with nautical terms, abaft and avast, starboard and port, fore and aft, and true to sailorly ways, his favourite drink was Demerara rum, taken Cuban style with Coca Cola.

Knut rarely spoke of his sailing experiences, except to say how much he liked Rio de Janeiro, and some stories about the whaling operations in Antarctica. He told a funny story about on the *Sørholt* on a return passage to Los Angeles; the bo'sun and an engineer picked up 250 monkeys for a California university research laboratory; they were in bamboo cages on the forepeak when, in a Pacific storm, a wave smashed the cages freeing 250 frightened monkeys to climb and hide everywhere possible. Many were lost overboard, many more starved, and only 30 or so were alive on arrival. No good said the laboratory, too few and in such poor condition. The boys were out money, the Captain was miffed, the monkeys doomed from day one.



Knut's official work portrait taken about 1961 (age 40) in Corner Brook and on the Marble Mountain slopes in 1987 (age 66) after winning the Old Sam Senior's Race

Stuff that's left – tangible and intangible

Knut died 22 February 2004 sitting in a bedroom chair of heart failure at 82, four days before my 57th birthday. I wrote a eulogy of sorts which the Unitarian minister read at his service, in which I tried to show how he had influenced my life, yet I actually had lived with him in his house for a mere 13 years, just double his seagoing life. He was a pretty powerful personality, although, like many sailors, archly conservative, somewhat intolerant of variety, and stubbornly inflexible in his views and values. One of his lessons I repeated in the message was “Never fear electricity.”

Knut's father Bjarne was, like Knut, the baby of his family. He ran away to America with a saloon singer and was found and returned by the Pinkertons out of Chicago from the Norwegian and Swedish lumber camps and mining towns of the American mid-west; he was quickly married to my grandmother, a Larsen from Oslo, which family had once been great property owners but by 1900 had fallen on hard times. Bjarne's brother Sigurd was an impressionist school painter who ran away to the south of France with another painter, a Swedish tailor's son, J. Wille Edelberg, before the First World War. He too was tracked by police detectives and both were brought home;

Edelberg married and painted sporadically afterwards, but Sigurd took up a Bohemian lifestyle, never married and painted until he died about 1947. My mother remembered him as a bit of a wildman, a drinker and a smoker.



Street Scene in Oslo ca. 1939 and *Ships in the Harbour* ca. 1943; impressionist style paintings by Sigurd Fosnaes

Afterword



Credit for Knut's ships' records and pictures go to war-sailors.com. The pages there contain several pictures taken of the day adrift by a passenger. Knut is one of the men in the lifeboat.

He said he and the Captain were the last men off as he was sending the Mayday until told to abandon ship. U-

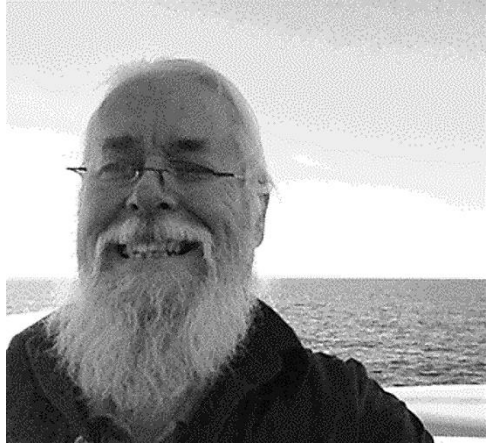
515 sent three torpedoes into the starboard side, the first two within seconds and the third seven minutes later, she sank 15 minutes later.

The U-boat captain questioned the captain of the *Sørholt*, apologized for the torpedoing, and gave the survivors cigarettes, water and food. They were spotted by an American patrol plane that afternoon and picked up by two British Motor Torpedo Boats and taken to Port au Spain, Trinidad.

Tor Arnljot Fosnæs

It is better to be born lucky than rich – my mother’s favourite saying

If I am asked to describe myself, in answer to the question, “What do you do?” for example, I usually say I am a *writer*, sometimes a *publisher*. I was a journalist, I used to say *hack writer*, or *research writer*, through most of my late teens and twenties; “two cents a word”. I dabbled with technology, in 1966 to 1973 I worked off and on as a concrete and asphalt tester and in the mid-70’s was involved in fisheries



Selfie taken off Greenland in 2012

research projects, as the writer, and with weather research as a microfilm transcriber, putting data from weather maps into early computer readable form (punch cards at that time). I’d worked in the iron ore mines of Labrador and Sudbury as a labourer and machine attendant in the late 1960’s, and taught grades seven and eight subjects for a year in Woody Point, Bonne Bay, for a princely \$140 a month.

In 1979, I brazened my way into a position as an offshore oil exploration ice and weather observer because I was a Newfoundlander and Brian Peckford said we should get first dibs. I was taken on with a one question interview, “Are you resourceful?” I replied, “As much as the next guy.”

I was older than most of the other fellows and saw the *Hollywood wages* as a way to pay for my newly built house and my imminent divorce and was to quickly realize how being on a ship somewhere on the ocean was an acceptable form of escapism. Sailing out the Narrows that first time seemed a perfectly natural thing to do.



Discoverer Seven Seas built 1976 – Evening Telegram file photo

I first went to sea in April 1979, with a week's preparation, at 32. I sailed to the Flemish Pass on the *Discoverer Seven Seas*, a drill rig about to drill the then deepest water oil exploration hole in history. After 28 days I returned by helicopter to St. John's and a week later was aboard the *Ben Ocean Lancer* heading for Davis

Strait. The nearest land was Breevoort Island offshore Baffin Island, between Frobisher Bay and Cumberland Sound. I did the whole trip, 70-odd days out and back to St. John's.

The winter and spring of 1979-1980, I worked rigs on the Grand Banks, the *Sedco 706* and *Sedco 709*; it is all a blur now. I wanted money and was willing to do the extra hitches, the long hitches; I volunteered for Christmas and New Year for the triple time for three days. There was a lot of helicopters back and forth, and, in those days



Ben Ocean Lancer built 1976 – Clyde Shipyards photo

the helicopter ride was hazardous enough. The machines were jury rigged with huge stainless steel fuel tanks down the center and quilted cloth blankets snapped into the thin metal hull. Very noisy, very cold, and very uncomfortable. We wore immersion suits which we called *body bags* and we thought, most likely incorrectly, at least our bodies would be found floating if something happened.



Sedco 706 built 1976 and *Sedco 709* – myship.com photos

June 1980 I was once again on the *Ben Ocean Lancer* headed for Davis Strait, again. This time I was to come out after 28 days for 14 and then return for the final days to well completion. The crew change was a helicopter to Breevoort Island, Twin Otter to Frobisher Bay (then, now Iqaluit), jet airliner to Montreal and on to Newfoundland. Crew change day came and I was packed and ready but as there had been a previous delay there was a backup and I slipped to the bottom of the list (the weather and ice man got little respect or consideration). The final chopper arrived and it was getting late in the evening. I and a fellow named Gary, a last minute addition on his way home because his house in Newfoundland burned down that day, were the last ones left.

At first the flight was to be cancelled, but the pilot decided that while night flying wasn't allowed, it was alright to take off before dark and land after dark, so off we went.

We landed in Breevoort about 2130 and were told we would have to stay overnight because some VIPs from Esso had insisted on going to Frobisher earlier and wouldn't wait for our chopper to arrive. The camp boss was getting us rooms for the night when another Twin Otter pilot came by and said he was dead-heading to Frobisher and if we wanted we could ride along; the second "private" flight for Gary and me in the same day!

About 2230 we dropped off the end of Breevoort Island runway, the runway ends in a 1000 foot cliff to the ocean. The two hour flight was rough, lots of buffeting winds and heavy rain. It seemed interminable and after two and a half hours the co-pilot came back and told us

there was some trouble at the airport and we would be circling for a little while longer.



Approaching Breevoort Island airstrip – from [youtube.com/watch?v=ecUg2PaUllg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecUg2PaUllg)

About 0130 we landed bumpily and trudged with our bags to the airport and caught a ride to the Continental, a work in progress motel. The bathroom door wasn't hinged and required an alert mind to get in and out without injury. There were two single beds and a cot crammed in, someone was already in one bed, I got

the cot near the door and the unhinged bathroom door. At 0500, answering a knock, I jumped up and threw open the door. The medic from our rig was getting everyone up for the flight out of Frobisher. I greeted him and he turned pale and fell into a faint. I held his head and patted his cheeks, remember he was the doctor, until he came to and I got him back on his feet.

“You're supposed to be dead,” he blurted.

The flight Gary and I missed in Breevoort had tried to abort a landing when the pilot overshot the runway. In the direction he was landing, to get away, he had to turn left, instead he turned right and smacked into a hillside at the end of the runway; all 18 hands were killed in the crash or the explosion and fire that followed.



Iqaluit air crash site in white circle – google earth image

Back home the word of the crash had gotten out and my boss was informed that I was on the flight, so it was a big surprise to him when I called and asked him to tell my family it wasn't me.

Asleep at the wheel

About 1981 I took up marine technology to supplement my rig-based weather and ice work. I was learning to build, deploy and recover oceanographic moorings with current meters, waverider buoys, and other instruments. This work was conducted from the back deck of anchor handling supply tugs (we always called them workboats or off-shore supply boats). There were a number of rigs on the Grand Banks and each one had an array of meters and buoys associated with it. The first supply boats in St. John's were a hodgepodge of old North Sea vessels but by 1980 they were predominated by OSA out of Europe, operated in Newfoundland by an Andrew Crosbie partnership company, they were commonly called "the Crosbie boats".

They had some Newfoundland crew, which grew over time, but the captains and chief engineers were German, mostly. I took trips on *Boltentor*, *Hirtenturm*, *Schnoorturm*, *Nordetor*, *Neutor* and *Ravensturm*.



Boltentor, at her launch, and *Ravensturm*, both built 1976 were part of the *Crosbie boats* operation in Newfoundland waters

The captain of the *Boltentor*, a young man in his mid-20's, had to manually control the ship when it was at a rig loading or offloading, a job that sometimes took hours of his attention. We were at the *Sedco 706* rig all day and well into the night before we were released to head to the drilling platform *Zapata Uglund* about 20 miles away, just before midnight. The mate came on watch but the captain told him to go below and do mate things because after the hour or so it would take to go to the Uglund he would have to come back on the bridge to hold her in position over there.

I was in the forward passenger cabin, right behind the chain locker, sound asleep, when we left; the captain set the autopilot and got his blanket and fell sleep in the captain's chair. At 17 knots a supply boat bearing down on a rig is a threatening thing, especially so when radio calls are ignored; halfway out they started calling; 5 miles out they asked the *Ravensturm*, to head us off and, if necessary, ram us. Lights blazing, sirens screaming, alarms sounding, horns bellowing they came at the *Boltentor*.

The captain woke up just as we passed the rig at about 150m, well within the rig's anchor pattern. He was replaced the next day and there were rumours he was last seen towing barges on the Orinoco River in South America.

Certainly a high speed crash of a supply vessel into the legs of a semi-submersible drill rig would have killed everyone on board and probably would have sunk both.

The Ocean Ranger

By early 1982 I was ice and weather on the *Zapata Uglund*. A nice rig, very well run by a Norwegian marine crew, everything went by the book. It was going to be my last hitch on the Grand Banks as there was a *no beard* rule coming into effect. Some Norwegians were also getting ready to transfer out because of the rule, so I had some support. In reality, rig operation were boring, no ice, predictable weather and a lot of fuss with the helicopter pilots who constantly questioned our observations; I chose to work 6pm to 6am just so I wouldn't have to do aviation weather reports.



Ocean Ranger built 1976 – thecanadianencyclopedia.com photo and *Zapata Uglund* built 1979, google image

The *Ocean Ranger* was slowly becoming notorious for a constant litany of problems, so much so that in the field we began to call her the *Ocean Danger*. One night I took a call from the barge control officer on the *Ranger* asking to speak to a ballast control officer on the *Ugland*. When he called back he was shocked when he was told they were loading cement into their deck tanks but had no way to know how much volume or weight they were taking on, "How do you calculate the volume of a conical tank?" was the request. The Norwegian blanched and, after giving the formula, shook his head and muttered, "They are in big trouble."

I was to crew change on February 8 or 9. There were delays for bad weather and I got a ship to shore radio call on the 8th from our office asking if I would consider going over to the *Ranger* to let a fellow observer come ashore early because his wife was having a baby. His regular change wouldn't or couldn't go out early and I was the last hope. Chopper over to the *Ranger* and change out, it was only for a week.

I said no, and that was that. I feared the *Ocean Ranger*, and during the couple of times I passed across her, from a supply boat to a helicopter or to another supply boat, I was nervous, both about my beard (the *Ocean Ranger*-ites were deadly down on beards, insisting you had to shave for even a few hours stay onboard) and for my general safety, given the head shaking and incredulity of the Norwegians on the *Ugland*.

I was home in bed on the morning the *Ranger* was lost; I made some calls to families of men I knew were on her, offering what comfort I could, but also trying to be realistic about survival possibilities.

A year later to the day

I set sail from Halifax in early February on board the *Arctic Prowler*, owned by McElhanney Surveying out of Vancouver and Calgary. Crewed by McKiel of St. Catherine's, Ontario, and directed by an Englishman named Rushton, the trip was fraught with difficulties from day one. Rushton insisted on setting off into the teeth of a force 10 gale from the east, meaning that even in the Halifax roads out past Governor's Island there was a lot of pitching and rolling. I probably had more sea time than most of the rest of them put together.

I had about 4 hours work to do on Banquereau Bank in support of Rushton's seismic and grab samples project. There was a full complement of navigators on board along with the seismic guys and the biologists. For most of the 28 days we hid behind Sable Island, not much shelter there, waiting for a better weather window to make the run to the bank. We made several attempts but were beaten back to Sable again and again.

On the 14th, the anniversary eve of the *Ocean Ranger* disaster, we were in hasty retreat running before a force 11 or better on our port quarter. The Prowler was completely manual; she still had speaking tubes on the bridge to the engine room. A former Fisheries Patrol and Research vessel, the *Cygnus*, built in the early 1950's on mine-sweeper/corvette lines, and was now sold off to private enterprise. She was a nice ride in bad weather although being 140 foot long and only 25 feet or so in the beam, she had a tendency to roll.

The mate, an American named Louis who lived in Montreal, had spent the Viet Nam war in charge of a torpedo gun boat patrolling the Mekong Delta, he had a wealth of war stories; while his deep sea experience was limited his river experiences certainly weren't. We were running before it, the mate on watch, when a huge wave (a rogue wave perhaps) of more than 80 feet crept up behind us and picked up the stern. She dove down by the bow about 35 degrees and went to starboard about 60 degrees and when we came up we were 180 degrees from our original course.

What saved us from broaching and possible rolling over after the wave came by was the engineer, who happened to be standing at the engine control panel when he felt the stern lifting. The Prowler didn't have a governor. Knowing the screw would come out of the water and over-rev the engine, he killed the engine and restarted it as soon as the screw was back in the water, thereby giving us propulsion, now heading into the seas.

The ship design must be given credit for righting herself after such an extreme pitch and roll, and the engineer for getting her back under power, for if we had gone powerless and beam to the 45 to 50 foot waves, we would certainly have rolled over.

Dropped and dipped and washed about

Working off Sable Island in the early 1990's I was picked up from a workboat by the old *West Venture* rig. This meant putting all my tools and sea bags into the man basket and then clinging on to the outside. I had done this many times over the previous years, it was standard. I was plucked off the deck and started to swing away to be hoisted to the rig deck. Suddenly, at about halfway up, say 40 feet or so, the whole shebang let go and the basket fell into the water.

I was in my Mustang floater suit, lying under the ropes of the man basket with the boxes and bags lying on top that; the water was fairly warm, and as I was bobbing about my face came up into air every now and then so I wasn't a-feared of drowning. I was trying to decide if I should let go and try to swim free or not when the crane cable took up the slack and got me up out of the water and hoisted to the deck. I lost my favourite hard hat. A crane drum failure, slippage or something was the reason and apologies all around from the crane man, the rig supervisor and the company man onboard.



West Venture built in 1973 and scrapped about 1993 shortly after a fifth leg was added – oilrig-photos.com photo and a typical rope personnel basket in use – maritimetraining.com photo

On the Grand Banks I was being lowered down to a workboat from the rig *Henry Goodrich*; the deck was full of containers and the landing spot was small and tight. The seas were running quite high, although it was mostly swell as the wind had dropped out earlier in the day. The supply boat was moving quite a lot, the roll was opening and closing the little deck space, so the crane operator was trying to time the drop down to just the right moment. He did pretty good on the

first attempt, except he banged the basket off the containers, first on one side, then the other, fortunately not hitting me off the containers, a couple of my bags and boxes were spilled out, crashing to the deck, making the landing spot even more cramped. As it was, he managed to get me onto the deck, landing the basket on top of my tool box.

I jumped clear and scampered forward not wanting to be smacked by the basket as it was lifted up, just then I saw a big greenie (a wave) climbing over the stern roller and marching up the deck. I grabbed for the binder chains on the nearest container, being flushed first forward and then, on the retreat of the water, aft. My bags and boxes landed nice and neat on the forward part of the deck right at the main winch and stopped there.

I was deploying a mooring on one of the OSA boats in what I would later learn were unacceptable sea states, but I was new and willing to take risks. The captain was able to keep her fairly steady during the rigging up of the mooring and we were able to get it into the water. I was back in the port quarter retrieving some ropes we used to deploy the mooring; the captain was already turning to starboard without looking for me back aft when I looked up and saw a greenie heading for me. The quarter was rounded inward and had a large hawsehole just behind the powered capstan. Quick, I jumped into the shelter of the quarter, laughing as the wave streamed over the quarter, only to be chagrined a second or two later as it retreated and filled the quarter. When I came into air again my left leg was hanging out through the hawsehole and my survival suit and boots were full of icy cold seawater.

The winter sea is so cold it feels like burning or scalding on your skin, so I had to quickly lie on the deck, wrestle out of the suit and my outer clothes and boots. I was a pretty sight when the crew came running out to help me, half naked, laying on the deck clutching my suit and boots. They said I was laughing but I expect it was hysteria.

We were backed into a rig in an attempt to offload a huge tank of glycol. It was fairly calm but with a big swell running. The load was manifested at 12 tonnes. The crane hook was made fast and the crane started to take the load. Usually the crane operator will take most of the slack on the wire timing it so the slack is all out when the ship is

at the top of its 15 – 20 foot heave, then as the ship goes down the crane takes the weight and begins the hoist.

The captain darted forward just in case when she came up so the stern wouldn't hit the load. With that the crane jib failed and the tank fell about 30 feet into the water just astern of the supply vessel. Incredibly, it floated and we were able to get a tugger winch cable on it and haul it back over the stern roller and get it secured. If it had hit the stern it would have caused untold damage.

What makes something normal?

I have transferred between two boats going rail to rail on the accommodations decks; jumped across the stern rollers from one to another; and done many transfers from zodiac or fast rescue craft, clambering up Jacob's ladders on the sides of vessels. It was all *normal*.

We all expected to die in a helicopter crash in the early days of offshore oil exploration, at least I did. Offshore Labrador one pilot would fly out to the rig even if it was obscured by fog. He would use his radar to sneak in sideways until he could see the derrick, then move aft and then more sideways until he dropped down on the helideck. He didn't think any more of it than that, so, of course, neither did we; it was *normal*.

One supply boat captain in Davis Strait, when he couldn't get a rope around a small iceberg in time to effectively move it away from the rig, actually nosed up to it and pushed it aside; there was a dent in the bow which he had to explain. The vessel was out of the Gulf of Mexico, had never seen Atlantic waters, let alone North Atlantic waters, and the only ice the crew had ever seen was in a glass; dangerous, exciting, foolish, whatever, he did it anyway. It was *normal*.

A Scot rig captain had a Suez Canal light installed on the wing of the bridge for spotting icebergs. It had a limited range of rotational motion, but when the two beams were focussed ahead it was a powerful light. Somewhere abeam of the Funk Islands I spotted a large iceberg on the long range radar, 24 miles or more away and well to starboard of our course and, as instructed, advised the Captain. He came on the bridge, turned on the light and changed the course of the \$180-million

rig straight at the iceberg and left instructions to call him when we could see the iceberg with the light.

I thought this was wrong and found the chief mate, another Scot, and advised him of the situation. He came to the bridge, corrected course and went to the captain's quarters (just off the bridge) where a lot of Scottish oaths and shouting went on for a half hour. Sounded like *Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving with a Pict*. That wasn't *normal*; not normal at all.

I once chased down a huge tanker dumping brine from the Windsor salt mines in the Laurentian Channel, at night. We got up close under her port quarter when a huge vent opened and the brine came shooting out about 40 feet; thousands of tonnes of brine were pumped out in about 10 minutes just 30 feet ahead of us. Added to this, being light ships, was the tanker's port screw thrashing about 6 feet above the surface just to our starboard side. There is nothing like the sight of tons of brass flying through the air about 50 feet away. The captain fought to keep our little wooden boat from being sucked in under the stern of the tanker, at 8 or 9 knots and in 4 foot waves. It seemed *normal* at the time but in hindsight it was foolish and dangerous.

Near misses make good stories. They are more important than actual accidents because we learn from them how to prevent injury and loss. Looking back at the near misses, I am struck by the fact that there was nothing really wrong about it at the time, you just got on with it without over-thinking it. *Close only counts in horseshoes*, we said. *A miss is as good as a mile*, we said.

In the mid-1990's, after completing an Advanced Diploma in Safety Engineering Technology, I concentrated on safe work practices, taking care to plan and rehearse every action on deck; choosing the right men for the jobs and documenting all my deck operations in various ship's safety programs. With pride, I can report no accidents or injuries in all my operations.

Working on the deck, using the ship's crew and equipment requires a high level of trust from and demonstration of competence to the captain, who is responsible for his ship and his men. I was able to establish that trust with most captains. If I couldn't, I simply avoided that ship for future trips.

Some other rigs and ships I was on



Pelerin built 1976 – crsl.com photo and *Kulluk* built 1983 - en.wikipedia.org photo



Joides Resolution aka *Sedco BP 471*; I had two trips on this one, 75 days each, Antarctica in 1987 and in Greenland in 2012 – tamu.edu photo and *Balder Hudson* built 1980 museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca photo



Trinity Sea and *Burin Sea* built 1983 and rebuilt 1999; the initial trip on the *Trinity Sea* to the Grand Banks was a frightening experience; heavy bottomed she had a quick five second roll; the crew stood by in the mess waiting for the order to abandon when the roll became extreme (15 degrees each way rail to rail every five seconds) in rough weather; on return to port she was fitted with bilge keels which reduced the extent of

the roll but, oddly enough, not the period. Originally built as ice class hulls by the Russian Neftegaz, they were purchased by Secunda Marine – secundamarine.com photos



Maersk Placentia and *Maersk Gabarus* built 1983 for Husky Oil; two of the six bought by Maersk; excellent boats but rolled like pigs when new and before they were fitted with bilge keels. The crew bunks ran fore and aft and many a man was thrown out onto the deck during their first few months of operation on the Grand Banks; they were so new a design they were called the *Darth Vader boats*; Husky named them Placentia Bay, Bonavista Bay, Trinity Bay, Chignecto Bay, Mahone Bay and Gabarus Bay – marinetraffic.com photos

I am unable to easily find pictures of other ships on which I sailed; Sun Tide; Moon Tide; Kreuzturm; Seaforth Highlander; Balder Cabot; Balder Baffin; Arctic Shiko; Freedom Service; Pioneer Service; Maersk Master; Acadian Gale; Alex Gordon; Kalvik; Atlantic Oak; and a host of 35-footers (Big Rock II), 45-footers, and a couple of 60-footers in places like Flower's Cove, Newfoundland, Rimouski, Quebec, and Main a Dieu, Nova Scotia. Too many to remember.

The most important thing I learned from all those trips?
Never piss off the cook!



Peary's Monument atop Kap York, Greenland.

I saw this from about 8 miles off in 2012. This Internet picture was taken in the 1970's. The 60 foot tower was built by a handful of Newfoundlanders and a lot of Inuit under the direction of Capt. Bob Bartlett acting for Peary's daughter.

There are movies online of the construction of the mortared tower which is topped by a bronze stepped pyramid; all local stone except for the marble letter P which was brought from America.

Seeing it and going ashore on the Falkland Islands I count among my best seagoing experiences.

ODE TO NEWFOUNDLAND

by Sir Cavendish Boyle

When sun rays crown thy pine clad hills,
And summer spreads her hand,
When silvern voices tune thy rills,
We love thee, smiling land.
We love thee, we love thee,
We love thee, smiling land.

When spreads thy cloak of shimmering white,
At winter's stern command,
Thro' shortened day, and starlit night,
We love thee, frozen land.
We love thee, we love thee
We love thee, frozen land.

When blinding storm gusts fret thy shore,
And wild waves lash thy strand,
Thro' spindrift swirl, and tempest roar,
We love thee windswept land.
We love thee, we love thee
We love thee windswept land.

As loved our fathers, so we love,
Where once they stood, we stand;
Their prayer we raise to Heaven above,
God guard thee, Newfoundland
God guard thee, God guard thee,
God guard thee, Newfoundland.



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My grandfather, my father and me, says Tor Fosnæs, were sailors for almost all of the 20th century. Looking back, the predominant memories are of the escapes, the near misses, the *almosts* ... for the sea is a cruel and unusual mistress.



As a result of carelessness or misadventure; acts of war, or just the implacable force of Nature, being at sea is being on the edge of the precipice, delicately balanced between life and death; that so few of us are lost is truly amazing.

Of course there are good times, smooth passages, endless horizons, calm seas; but these are much harder to remember in individual instances.

**Here are three sailors' stories for \$10.
What a deal!**

Cover photos: front, the *Maersk Placentia* taken by weather and ice observer Perry White from the bridge of the semi-submersible *Zapata Uglund* in the 1990's; back, survivors of the *Sørholt* torpedoed adrift and waiting for rescue off Trinidad in 1942



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