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Booklover -- Sea

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At the same time, Google, Internet Ar-

Hurtling Toward the Finish Line

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Ivy Anderson was appointed to the California Digital Library effective January 2, 2006. In this role, Anderson coordinates and provides systemwide leadership in buying and licensing digital content. Her efforts also extend beyond licensed information, to the acquisition and management of select printed materials and reformatting. She also plays an important part in the university’s strategic goal of addressing the profound problems in the marketplace for scholarly publications. Prior to joining the CDL, Anderson worked at Harvard University Library, where she developed a digital acquisitions program. She is widely known for her work in advancing the goals of libraries and library consortia.

Booklover — Sea

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O n the last Sunday of April, in Mt. Pleasant, SC, the shrimp trawlers nose out of Shem Creek festooned with brightly colored flags. They parade by the pier at the new Memorial Park to receive their blessing. Many feel this annual event is essential, prior to the beginning of the shrimping season. Each boat is called by name and given a special blessing for good harvest and safe return to harbor. Then the festivities begin. Music, food, shrimp eating contests, dancing, and arts and crafts entertain the crowd that has gathered to witness this fishing community tradition.

My husband and I used to be a part of this shrimping community. We owned a shrimp trawler that was tied up at the Guechee Seafood Dock on Shem Creek. Every spring brought an intense time of repair and maintenance culminating in our blessing. The season opened soon after the event, and the long hours of trawling for shrimp began. We have long ago traded our life in the mercurial shrimping community for a somewhat more regular life in the marine research field. But every year during spring there is the intense time of repair and maintenance before my husband returns to the sea, taking the marine biologist wherever along the South Carolina coast they want to go. His love for the sea extends from his profession into his recreation, as he loves to fish and dive.

The love affair that men have with the sea is like no other, and two short novellas, The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway and The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor by Gabriel García Márquez, completely immerse the reader in the power and seduction of the sea. Hemingway’s novella is probably one of the best known works of a Nobel Literature Laureate, as well as of the author. The lesser known story by García Márquez is remarkable in that it is true.

The Old Man and the Sea accompanied me on a recent trip to Boston. Periodically it is nice to reacquaint yourself with an old friend. It is not long before I am balancing myself in a fishing boat, smelling the salt air, and hoping for a good catch.

Everyone who has ever made a living from the sea can identify with Santiago as the old fisherman feels the tug of the fishing line after over 80 days without a fish. In simple declarative sentences, Hemingway gives the reader the intensity of every ache as Santiago first prays for the fish to come, then patiently triumphs over the fish, and ultimately loses his prize to the sharks. Hemingway’s remarkable use of metaphors and imagery creates a story that commands a large presence in the literary world, not unlike the fish that is lashed to the side of Santiago’s boat. Everyone who reads this gem of fiction has been touched by the novella and left with a sense of the sea’s fickle nature.

While in Boston I stumbled upon the Brattle Book Store on West Street. Established in 1825 it claims to be the largest bookstore in the New England area and one of the oldest and largest antiquarian bookstores in America. Boston is a place where you could spend your life exploring America’s revolutionary history, and yet I gravitate to the bookstore. There I found The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor by Gabriel García Márquez. García Márquez is one of my all time favorite authors so I decided to add this little book to my collection. On the return flight to Charleston I had the good fortune to be upgraded to Business Class, where I settled into the comfort of a large seat with ample legroom and began this tale of the shipwrecked sailor. Every seafarer’s family members’ nightmare is to learn of a loss at sea. Life rafts, flotation devices, GPS, EPRBs, and radio communication are among the safety devices aboard every vessel. But the sea is temperamental, and what is beautiful can become deadly in an instant.

Luis Alejandro Velasco is stationed aboard the Colombian military destroyer Caldas. The ship is being repaired in Mobile, Alabama and will be returning to its home port of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. As the date for departure nears, Luis is burdened with a strong sense of foreboding that he cannot reconcile. He goes through the motions of good-byes in his last days in Mobile and boards the ship. His “radar” continues to tell him that something is off as the ship feels funny under his feet. All of the American “gifts” that crew members have purchased for their families back home in Colombia are stowed on the deck and, thus, the seaworthiness of the Caldas is compromised. Luis along with eight other crew members find themselves struggling on the deck during a violently rough sea. A wave washes over the deck, and all are instantly swimming. They fear the boat has sunk, but as Luis reaches a life raft he sees the Caldas crest a wave and continue along its course. One by one his shipmates are lost as the ones he can hear and see are unable to make it to the raft in the boiling sea. For the next 10 days the reader shares his tiny life raft with no water, food, or protection from the grueling sun, all told in simple declarative sentences. García Márquez was the ghost writer for Luis’s recounting, and the story of this phenomenal event was published in 1955 as a series of newspaper articles in the El Espectador. The revelation that contraband was being transported on the military vessel was an embarrassment to the dictatorial government of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, which resulted in the closure of the newspaper and led to García Márquez’s “nomadic and somewhat nostalgic exile that in many ways also resembles a drifting raft.” In 1970 when García Márquez wrote the forward to the book which compiled the series he mused that the publisher was more interested in García Márquez’s notoriety as a Nobel Laureate than the incredible story which he had the opportunity to recount for the world.

So now it is April, and the sea once again sings a siren’s song to the fishermen, sailors, and seafarers. My husband packs for his trip, and I have stashed my copy of The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor in his bag. I will pray for his safe return and that he will never be lost at sea, only lost to the lure of the sea.