

The first time I went sailing, I was most surprised by the fact that it's not actually windy on deck. I imagined it like driving on the freeway in a convertible with the top down; wind roaring in my ears, eyes watering, hair every which way. I never considered that sailboats move with the wind. It's quiet, too. Again, I had pictured the speeding car but that's not right. And, I thought I'd spend my time thinking lofty thoughts and have some glorious epiphany about the circle of life or our water planet; like I'd land back on shore, changed, with eyes full of stars and a reaffirmed determination to recycle. I was different, afterward, but the changes were much more subtle.

I had always wanted to learn to sail. I love the water, but that's not unusual growing up in the Puget Sound. It puts the ocean front and center of people's lives. We talk about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. We worry about El Niño and discuss rainwater runoff like it's vital to national security. I grew up my whole life within smelling distance of the sea and sand and have spent years on the shores of Commencement Bay and Owen's Beach, Point Defiance and Gray's Harbor.

On the coast, near Westport, the first thing I do after parking is stand and gaze at the horizon line. My mother says it's because I don't like to unload the car. But that's not completely true. The horizon is a boundary line. It conceals and entices. Its gentle curve hides adventure behind the setting sun. I dreamed of crossing it; following the light to see what it revealed. In Washington, I can look at the end of the world and draw a straight line to Asia.

Standing on the south shore of Commencement bay, I used to watch the sailboats glide past. I watched them and dreamed about jumping on deck like a pirate and sailing, of course, into that enigmatic sunset. I would press the crew into service (they'd thank me later) and embark on my voyage of discovery like Cook, or Frobisher, or Magellan. Sailing past the horizon drop,

proving the earth was round and the crust was broken into plates and on islands, animals came alive from dreams and dared to exist, refusing to fit in any one category. I would be a mysterious and formidable captain, steering, undaunted, toward the unknown with my loyal crew who'd follow me anywhere; quite unlike Captain William Bligh.

Ferdinand Magellan named the Pacific Ocean. He named half of the world. I could have done that. That voyage was the first to circumnavigate the globe in 1521. Magellan died before he could finish, killed in an island skirmish, but his ship continued on. I wonder if he was afraid to die out there. Who did he leave behind? Did it weigh on him?

Robert Gray found the mouth of the Columbia River. The roiling water was too boisterous for his ship to enter and he thought he had found the fabled Northwest Passage. I grew up camping near the Washington coast harbor that bears his name. I used to stand in the dunes, keeping out of sight behind a low hill and imagine that I had just landed there. The constant wind ruffling through the sweetgrass. The hot, soft sand sliding under my feet. The smell of the saltwater and campfire smoke drifting back and forth. What must they have thought? Did they know what they had found? Had they stood where I did and looked back at the sea, like me?

Once, when I was younger, I saw a lady crewing in a sailboat on the bay. The tide was in and their boat came close to the shore. Close enough for me to see her face and for her to see me, a gangly kid staring, transfixed. She raised her hand and waved to me as they tacked. I don't think I waved back. I was, at that moment, filled with an intense longing, and I would have given anything to be her. To have a world of possibilities open to me.

Washington state has over 200 miles of coastline and numerous forested islands around the Sound. Mount Olympus on the peninsula is surrounded by a temperate rainforest. The land is crisscrossed by rivers, mountains, and glacial remains. Mythology. Adventure. Quest. This is

where I grew up. I learned about Lewis and Clark in school. They were explorers over land, and they trampled all over the Northwest. Whenever I hiked around Point Defiance, I always wondered if they had made it that far. Did they stand by this tree? Or did they stop here and look over the Sound like this? I always tried to imagine what the forest must have looked like to them. Old growth; no shrubs or underbrush. Just giant trunks with full branches, high overhead, creating a perpetual dusk and pine needles piled on the ground; each cushioned step releasing their spicy scent into the air. Did they also love the smell of pine and sap warmed by the summer sun? Merriweather Lewis died on my birthday just 173 years before I was born. He has the same initials as I do, too. Coincidence?

During the Age of Exploration, the only way to cross the ocean was to sail. To voyage. When I decided to learn to sail, it never occurred to me that what I wanted was something more than just that. At the time, I wanted a change. I was six months into the reality of my brother-in-law's suicide. Eight years recovering from my family's divorce. I didn't know that in three months my stable job at a bank would disappear into the 2008 market crash, or that, after a summer of sailing, I'd choose to go back to school for my bachelor's which, in turn, led to my escape from my hometown. Escape. Explore. Can there be one without the other? Sailing was the catalyst for me. It was the boat, the wind, and the sunset. It all coalesced into an ache in my chest, a pain so exquisite in its desire.

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue—"to boldly go where no man has gone before." Columbus wanted spices. Captain Cook sailed to see what there was to see. He was killed in Hawaii during his third visit there. Cook had been to so many islands and had successfully circled the globe, I'm sure he expected to make it home that last time, too. Did his family? I wonder if they assumed he'd spend his twilight years with them, bouncing grandchildren on his

knee and enthralling them with stories of far off lands and people who don't live like they do. Was it difficult for him, for Lewis, for Magellan, to cut those ties? To know they would likely never return?

People say: the best part of going away is coming back. Or: the best part of the vacation is coming home again. And: nothing makes us appreciate home like leaving it. My family loves coming home. Making the turn back to the familiar. I don't get it. Leaving home hurts—for some. Realizing you can't have everything you want is heartbreaking. Climbing the mountain and being the first one to see what's on the other side is a thrill. I need to know what's out there. I must see it for myself. This is the thing that sets me apart from the rest of my family.

I don't look back and wish I was at home. I've never been homesick, even as a child. There's something inside me that won't be satisfied until I'm moving, until I don't recognize what's in front of me. I used to think there was something wrong with me. Did Magellan struggle with this? Lewis had Clark to hang out with. Did it bother Captain Cook? He left his home and family and followed the sun and wind around the world. He died so far from the place of his birth. Am I willing to do the same? What does that say about me? I always remember Tevye's middle daughter, Hodel, singing to him at the train station in Fiddler on the Roof:

*How can I hope to make you understand*

*Why I do, what I do,*

*Why I must travel to a distant land*

*Far from the home I love?*