

Ghost Ship



SUMMER 1959. Fogged in, our chartered cruising boat approaches with caution Swans Island off the coast of Maine. My cousin and I, young boys, are wearing orange life jackets. Holding on to the head stays, we peer from the bow into the motionless mist, looking for the light from Burnt Coat Harbor lighthouse or for a red or black channel marker. In the dead calm there is no sound in front but the lap of gray-green water as we motor forward. These coastal waters with their granite ledge rock are unforgiving to wooden-hulled craft.

Wickham Skinner.
Pulpit Harbor,
North Haven Island,
Maine.
Photograph, 2006.

“Do you see anything?” my uncle calls out over the drone of the engine. “No. Nothing,” we shout back. I rub my eyes and look even harder into the fog. I imagine a great three-masted ship appearing across our bow, like the wreck we saw in the mud flats in Wiscasset. My cousin slaps my arm with a piece of seaweed from the anchor chain. I nearly jump out of my skin. “Hey. Cut that out!” I hiss. This is no time for joking around, I think. In the end, through a combination of cool-headed navigating and a little luck, we reach the harbor safely and anchor for the night.

Some passages have a way of sticking with us. Recalling the excitement of finding Swans Island emerges for me years later, intact from the mist of memory. When reconstructing historical events, sometimes a facsimile is all that we have to work with. The cover of this Reader, *Boatdeck, Cunarder* (1923), with funnels and vents of a Cunard ocean liner, is in fact a ghost ship. The original 18x12-foot painting disappeared during WWII. Like the Lost Generation of American expatriates, all that is left of Gerald Murphy’s artistic voyage into post-WWI Europe are the stories associated with him and his wife, a limited number of his paintings, and only this photograph of the ocean liner.

No matter which byways we choose, we are all traveling our own paths of adventure. *Passages: Timeless Voyages of Spirit* explores moments when people are fully engaged in, or caught unaware by, the business of living. This collection of essays, poetry, and stories combines the whimsy one finds in fairytales with the realities of life-changing events. Breaking out of predictable routine, the writers discover unexpected vistas of youth, middle age, and beyond. Through imaginative interplay of past and present, coupled with moments of self-awareness, *Passages* leads to watershed events, moments that provide new understandings of who we are as we journey through life.

Being comfortable in our own skins—accepting our paths of discovery as necessarily unique—enables the narrators of these essays, poetry, and stories to travel far and wide. Each writer shows that being who we are while living in the moment is the big ticket—our progress determined as much by our perception of ourselves and our surroundings as by our trajectory through space and time. “In the inner meaning of the Word,” Swedenborg wrote, “*to journey* refers to the pattern and sequence of life.” To that end, perhaps dawn’s breaking light and color is a precursor of separation and growth, preparing us for our voyage out and return, transformed, to the place of beginning.