

The MERMAIDS

ISSUE
2013 ANNUAL
NUMBER 25

MAMI WATA *the*
SACRED WATER SPIRIT

TIM GUNN *talks about*
MERMAID FASHION

HANNAH FRASER *on* LIFE
UNDERWATER

from **WARSAW** *to*
WEEKI WACHEE
spectacular mermaid destinations

Stephen G. Bloom on
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the tears of mermaids

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A woman is shown swimming underwater, wearing a custom-made mermaid tail. The tail is a mix of dark green and gold scales, with a large, dark fin. She is wearing a dark, mesh-like bikini top. The background is clear blue water with some light rays and bubbles.

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Welcome!

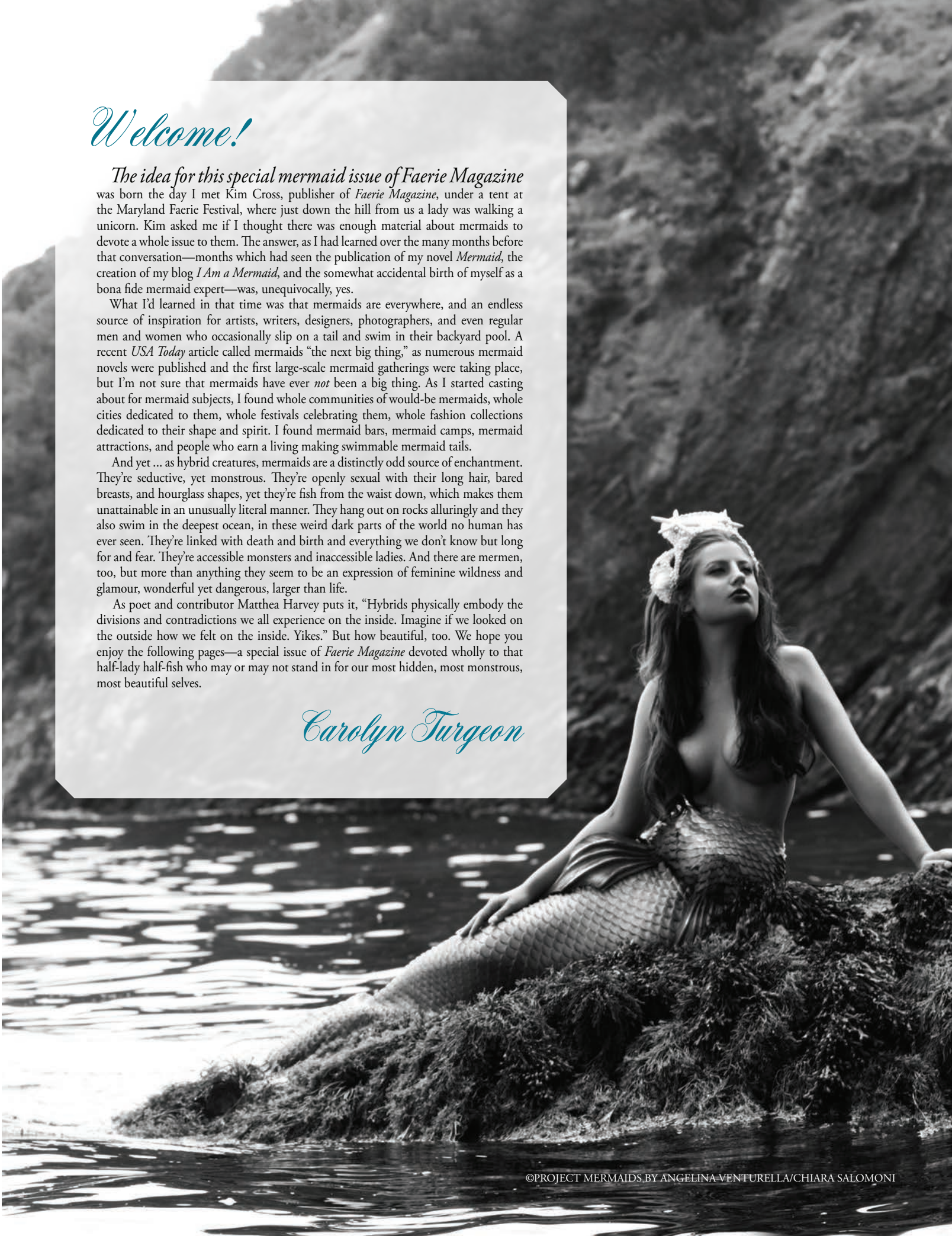
The idea for this special mermaid issue of Faerie Magazine was born the day I met Kim Cross, publisher of *Faerie Magazine*, under a tent at the Maryland Faerie Festival, where just down the hill from us a lady was walking a unicorn. Kim asked me if I thought there was enough material about mermaids to devote a whole issue to them. The answer, as I had learned over the many months before that conversation—months which had seen the publication of my novel *Mermaid*, the creation of my blog *I Am a Mermaid*, and the somewhat accidental birth of myself as a bona fide mermaid expert—was, unequivocally, yes.

What I'd learned in that time was that mermaids are everywhere, and an endless source of inspiration for artists, writers, designers, photographers, and even regular men and women who occasionally slip on a tail and swim in their backyard pool. A recent *USA Today* article called mermaids “the next big thing,” as numerous mermaid novels were published and the first large-scale mermaid gatherings were taking place, but I'm not sure that mermaids have ever *not* been a big thing. As I started casting about for mermaid subjects, I found whole communities of would-be mermaids, whole cities dedicated to them, whole festivals celebrating them, whole fashion collections dedicated to their shape and spirit. I found mermaid bars, mermaid camps, mermaid attractions, and people who earn a living making swimmable mermaid tails.

And yet ... as hybrid creatures, mermaids are a distinctly odd source of enchantment. They're seductive, yet monstrous. They're openly sexual with their long hair, bared breasts, and hourglass shapes, yet they're fish from the waist down, which makes them unattainable in an unusually literal manner. They hang out on rocks alluringly and they also swim in the deepest ocean, in these weird dark parts of the world no human has ever seen. They're linked with death and birth and everything we don't know but long for and fear. They're accessible monsters and inaccessible ladies. And there are mermen, too, but more than anything they seem to be an expression of feminine wildness and glamour, wonderful yet dangerous, larger than life.

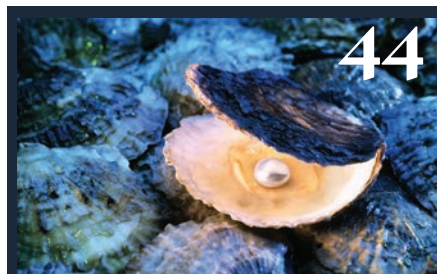
As poet and contributor Matthea Harvey puts it, “Hybrids physically embody the divisions and contradictions we all experience on the inside. Imagine if we looked on the outside how we felt on the inside. Yikes.” But how beautiful, too. We hope you enjoy the following pages—a special issue of *Faerie Magazine* devoted wholly to that half-lady half-fish who may or may not stand in for our most hidden, most monstrous, most beautiful selves.

Carolyn Turgeon



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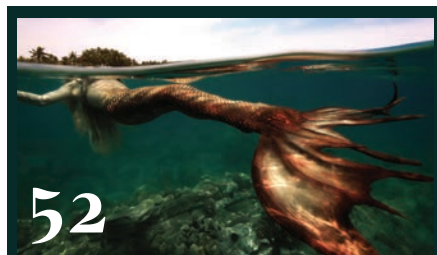
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As a PADI Master Scuba Diver, underwater model, and full-time professional mermaid, Linden Wolbert would spend all of her time in the water with kids if her hands didn't get so pruny! She also shares the life aquatic with others via underwater wildlife documentary films and underwater performance. "Mermaid Minute," her educational ocean web series for kids, "edutains" young viewers about an array of animals and ocean life. Find out more at Mermaidsinmotion.com and Mermaidminute.com.

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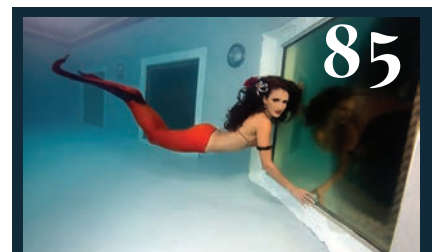


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ON BEING A SOMETIMES MERMAID

Twig the Fairy

Though I'm a fairy at heart, I've always longed to be—if only briefly—a mermaid. Who doesn't yearn to slip into the water and enter a world populated by graceful rays, sleek sharks, and lush kelp gardens? I love the wind and air, but as I pass over glittering lakes and vast oceans, I find myself dipping my palms into the water and wondering what lies underneath.

So I went on an adventure. When no one was looking, when my fairy friends were off whispering into the ears of children, I traded my wings for a tail and the air for water. Now let me admit, it's not always easy for a fairy to swim. At first, I floated on the water and waited for my wings to carry me along. Then I plunged beneath the surface and tried to fly. I flapped around a lot and I think I saw a sea turtle laughing at me. I needed a tail, I realized. Luckily I had a mermaid friend who was willing to trade places. It takes so much strength to move through the water, but what a joyful feeling it is. I spread my fluke and just went ... and before long I felt like I was flying!

Being a mermaid is profound—wild, free, and sprinkled with a dash of defiance. In the water, everything slows down and becomes quiet. As I flew and glided along I felt fish slide against my skin, saw sand shimmering from the ocean floor, watched magical creatures pass beneath me. I'm pretty sure a moray eel winked at me. I winked back.

Best of all, I met other mermaids, my secret kin. We gathered in a pod, my mermaid sisters and I, and swam at great speeds and with wild abandon. It was hard for me to keep up at first—they're so strong! There's a unique kinship among mermaids. We laughed and they shared secrets as we danced through the water. They showed me their favorite hidden grottos and caves, all their most stunning sunken treasures. They filled my hands with rocks and gems. When we said goodbye, I promised to come visit them again. Someday I hope they'll visit me on land and have some fairy escapades, too!

I did learn a lot on my mermaid adventure:

- * Seaweed takes hours to comb out of your hair
- * You can't have a tea party underwater because the tea won't pour
- * Mermaids get an amazing workout every day
- * Communicating underwater can be difficult
- * The ocean is even more magical than you think
- * Mermaids have to watch out for glittering lures and restful-looking nets
- * Shimmery tails are stronger and faster than they look
- * Seahorses can be very mischievous and untrustworthy
- * Mermaids sleep very well at night; all that swimming is exhausting

So now that I'm back on land, I tip a wing to my graceful mermaid sisters all over the world, those brave souls who go where no human (or fairy) has gone before. Sometimes, as I fly through the air, I close my eyes and imagine I'm back there with them, the sun streaming down through the water, everything quiet and soft. Come to think of it, I think I hear the sea calling me right now.

Join me?



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HOW TO
FALL
IN
LOVE
WITH A
MER-
MAID

by
ALICE
HOFFMAN

Art by Charles Vess

1 Do not stand on the shore and soulfully look out to sea. If you do so, all you will see is a log floating in the shallows, or a silver fish, or a shadow beneath the wave that is neither human or animal. We will glide right past and you will never know we've been here, except that your hair and clothes will be so damp you will wonder if you walked through a rainstorm and hadn't noticed. Your intention, of course, is to find one of us and fall in love. You have been dreaming of us, and in your dreams we are made out of moonlight and water, we call you to us, and you step into the creek in your back yard and are carried along to the sea. We have all the time in the world, and we are cold, we will chill you down to your bones. When you imagine our first embrace you imagine ecstasy. For good reason.

Crouch down, be humble, do not show us what we do not have, the freedom of your legs and of your vast world. We are known to be jealous. We can be moody and disappear in an instant. Instead, show us your face. In that we are similar.

2 Do not carry a fishing pole, or worse, a net. Every man who dreams of us dreams a fisherman's dreams. We will be caught and tied and taken from our element, we will be yours, in a bathtub, in the dark, without words. Do not be disappointed, we speak, like any other woman, and the truth is, we want what all women want. Someone who will talk to us, tell us stories, make us coffee. Our dreams are of beds with clean sheets, bowls of hot soup, cottages where yellow roses grow outside the door. What is simple for you is complicated for us. Merely walking down a street is impossible given our condition, running through a field of grass is what we dream of most. We yearn for a man who loves us as if we were a simple woman and not a dream, as if our long dark hair did not reach to the floor, and our eyes were not sea-green. There is only one net that can hold us, a strand of words stretched out in the shallows, come to me, hear only me, I know you even though you are a mystery, I know love is a simple thing.

Those with nets will only find fish. That is not what we are.

3 Carry salt, which we always desire. Do not forget pears, from trees we have never seen and which we imagine blooming as we fall asleep in the depths on our beds of coral. Bring a dress made of silk. Red is best. In your backpack, have a photograph of yourself as a child. Have chocolates and leather-bound books. Pearls are nothing to us. We have treasures you cannot imagine, and yet we yearn for your world, a leaf, a kiss, a front door. You have to draw us to you with those earthly things that make life on land worth living. If you begin to read we will hear you. Tell us that once upon a time there was a young woman who was lost, say she found her way through cold waters, that given the right circumstances—a vow of true love, and complete devotion—she discovered she could walk. You will be speaking of miracles, of transformations that seem impossible. But we will listen. It is so cold where we are beneath the sea that our flesh turns blue, our scales are silver, but we long for things we can never have: sunlight, bookstores, shops filled with spices, children running to us through the grass, and, now that we have heard you, you most of all.

4 Now we wait for you, in the creek beside your house. We listen to the wrens and the mourning doves in the woods. We can hear the wind. There are ferns and old oak trees and the water is shallow. We bleed on the sharp edges of the rocks. We have to lie flat in certain places where there is a bend so that the water will cover us. My sisters leave at night, dehydrated, disenchanted, sick of the world of men. I stay in the one last deep pool where there are minnows so pale they are nearly invisible. You walk outside. It is July and hot and you come to the creek and crouch down. You put your hand in the water, and that is when you catch me. Without meaning to, without a net, my hand meets yours.

5 My kiss is cold, no one tells you the truth about that. But if you mind you don't say. Love with me is like a dream you whisper, and soon enough the water around us is hot as tap water. Nothing is cold. I can't even remember the ocean. What is coral? What are pearls? Nothing but stones in the sea.

People say I pulled you into the creek, but that isn't true, nothing could have kept you away. Anyway, the water was shallow.

6 There has never been anyone like me, that's true. I am a woman, but something more. It is the more that seduces you, but it is the woman you hold in your arms as you tell the story of your life, how you grew up in a city, one of many brothers, how you felt as if you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. In that we are the same. I am already forgetting where I came from and only think of what I want. That is always a mistake.

7 In August the creek dries up. You carry buckets of water through a field of ferns. You turn on the garden hose and keep it running. And then one day you bring out a net. I gasp and say nothing when you carry me into your house. The bathtub is full. You don't mean to trap me, only to save me. And although I listen, I've heard this story before.

8 I am paler, ice blue. I've cut my aqua-colored fingernails and painted them red. I wear my hair in braids tied with ribbons. Your friends don't like me no matter what I do. They say I think I'm better than they are and when I speak it sounds as if I'm underwater. You tell them how wonderful I am, revealing private information about our lives. You show them the bathtub and how you fill it with water from the creek; the men bashfully scoop up the minnows I bathe with, and blush with the mystery of who I am. When they have dinner parties, their wives don't invite me. They don't give a reason but I know it has something to do with my green eyes, with their husbands pleading with them to put ice cubes in their mouths, so their kisses will be more like mine.

9 It is winter and the creek is frozen, I can see it from my window. There is the pear tree I always longed to see, black and coated in ice. I have soup for supper, I sleep in a bed. You have begun to leave me at home. It is too difficult to carry me, to make excuses. At night you come home drunk and throw yourself into bed. I try to walk, and soon learn. You applaud me, but you seem disappointed and at night you complain that my kiss isn't as cold, that I do not chill you, that I am like any other woman, wanting you home in the evenings, crying in bed.

10 At last you bring me signs of spring: wavering branches of pear blossoms, a wren in a cage who soon forgets how to sing. The snow melts. When I wear a long skirt I look like any other woman as I hang laundry on the line. I listen to you, drinking beer in the house and laughing with your friends. But I also hear the creek, which is beginning to rise once again. When I leave, you will follow. For weeks you will crouch on the bank of ferns, reaching into the cold water, mourning what you've lost, but you won't catch me. I'm already gone.

Alice Hoffman is the bestselling author of more than 30 works of fiction for both adults and teens. Her most recent novels are The Dovekeepers and the upcoming The Museum of Extraordinary Things. Alicehoffman.com.

A YOUNG MAN'S GUIDE to PICKING UP MERMAIDS

Lord Whimsy



©SUSAN CRAWFORD

It should come as no surprise that the relations between humans (*Homo sapiens*) and mermaids (*Homo sirenus*) have long been fraught with misunderstanding. After all, a mermaid's submerged perspective on life is bound to be alien to our own landlocked point of view. However wide the gulf may be between mermaids and humans, there is much that we can do to lessen the friction along our shared shorelines. In fact, there is a veritable shoal of extremely thick books on the finer points of etiquette and manners between humans and mermaids (Roger T. McBrine's *Guide to Manners and Customs Among the Pelagic Races* remains the definitive work on the subject). So this topic, being well-trodden sand, does not require further elaboration by Yours Truly. And besides, my intentions in this case are not in the least bit honorable.

We're all adults here, so let's be honest: mermaids—with their winsome gaze, silvery complexions, and graceful curves—are sexy. You know it, and they know it. They don't call them sirens for nothing. Besides, a tryst with a mermaid is the stuff of summertime daydreams, the memories of which will warm your feet in your old age, especially during those cold, dark winter days that await us all. To never having tried romancing a mermaid is to truly know the bitter taste of regret: you only go around once, after all.

It's a well-known fact that mermaids are a vain but sensitive lot; one often sees them conspicuously perched on jetties and rocks in the middle of harbors, combing their long, lustrous curls. Although they may affect an aloof air, the mermaids know very well what they are doing: they love nothing more than to be admired. This girlish, coy tactic for attention is often misread as narcissism, but it is actually the result of insecurity. Indeed, the feelings of mermaids are easily hurt. Rude catcalls and vulgar turns of phrase shouted by passing fishermen have done untold harm over the years (as do their trawling nets, which have caused no end of instability in the mermaid real estate market).

When wooing a mermaid, persistence is key. Start with subtle gestures: a respectful tip of the hat will do, perhaps with a "G'day, miss" thrown in after a few encounters. Above all, remember to let her make the first move: if she wishes to make conversation, she will. In fact, they can get quite chatty—in the most charming sense, mind you.

It helps to have something in common, so brush up on your marine biology, maritime lore, shipwrecks, tide tables, even shanties. Some gents have gone so far as to learn how to dive (mermaids especially like fellas who have mastered free diving). However, being a spear fisherman is a non-starter; it's best not to even bring up the subject.

Once you've had a few friendly conversations, it's time to take things to the next level: ladies love a man who can cook. Offer to make lunch one day, and have a seaside picnic together. It doesn't have to be anything fancy: a bento box of sushi, or some udon soup with seaweed broth is always a smart choice. Anything with terrestrial meats—chicken, pork, beef—is not a good idea. Keep it fishy: broiled scallops and clam chowder are irresistible comfort foods to mermaids. (A warning: mermaids are lactose intolerant, so no cheeses or ice cream, please. Don't force her to broach such an awkward topic.)

She will be flattered by small but thoughtful presents: give her a new seashell comb that you've carved yourself. Or a seal pup. Or that scale polish that she likes so much. You know: the coconut-scented one.

Helping her with the less glamorous tasks, like helping her get fishing hooks out of her hair, will show her that you're committed to her happiness and comfort. In short: treat your girl right. Listen to her. Appreciate her. Fuss on her. Let her know that she's your minnow, and that the tides of your heart flow only to her.

But before you start a relationship with a mermaid, it's important to realize that, sadly, these things don't last. There will be sun, fun, and sand, sure, but there will also be tearful goodbyes. Just be sure that when the inevitable comes, both of you leave with fond memories. A bit sadder, yes—but wiser, perhaps even fulfilled. You will have learned first-hand that the most fleeting things are often the most beautiful.

Whimsy was dismayed one morning to discover that he had accidentally written, designed, and illustrated The Affected Provincial's Companion, Volume One, which has been optioned for film by Johnny Depp's production company. Learn more at Lordwhimsy.com.

Lara Mandyn is a scuba-certified underwater model and photographer who's been modeling for nearly a decade. "Water pervades my dreams and has always been a great source of strength and comfort to me," she says. Here she is posing in a clawfoot bathtub submerged in the Weeki Wachee River, in a photo by famed photographer Chris Crumley.



©CHRIS CRUMLEY

The Backyard Mermaid slumps across the birdbath, tired of fighting birds for seeds and lard. She hates those fluffed-up feathery fish imitations, but her hatred of the cat goes fathoms deeper. That beast is always twining about her tail, looking to take a little nip of what it considers a giant fish. Its breath smells of possible friends. She collects every baseball or tennis ball that flies into her domain to throw at the creature, but it advances undeterred, even purring. To add further insult to injury it has a proper name, Furball, stamped on a silver tag on its collar. She didn't even know she had a name until one day she heard the human explaining to another one, "Oh that's just the backyard mermaid." Backyard Mermaid she murmured, as if in prayer. On days when there's no sprinkler to comb through her curls, no rain pouring in glorious torrents from the gutters, no dew in the grass for her to nuzzle with her nose, not even a mud puddle in the kiddie pool, she wonders how much longer she can bear this life. The front yard thud of the newspaper every morning. Singing songs to the unresponsive push mower in the garage. Wriggling under fence after fence to reach the house four down which has an aquarium in the back window. She wants to get lost in that sad glowing square of blue. Don't you?

THE BACKYARD MERMAID

Matthea Harvey

Matthea Harvey is the author of several books of poetry, including the award-winning Modern Life, as well as the illustrated erasure Of Lamb and the storybooks The Little General and the Giant Snowflake and Cecil the Pet Glacier. Learn more at Mattheaharvey.com.

An underwater photograph showing sunlight filtering through the water surface, creating a shimmering effect. The water is a deep blue color, and the light rays are visible as they penetrate the water.

life

UNDERWATER

By Carolyn Turgeon





hannah Fraser travels all over the world and is the most famous of the professional mermaids working today—a recent *Businessweek* article called her the “Angelina Jolie of the tail business.” She’s also, arguably, the one who invented the profession. This is what I find most fascinating about her: of all the girls who grew up dreaming of mermaids, it was Hannah who grew up and actually became one.

There’s something wonderful and brave about someone taking that seemingly impossible step, taking a dream and making it a reality. Now girls all over the world are following in Hannah Fraser’s fluked wake, and discovering their own mermaid selves.

Recently I spoke with Hannah to find out what inspired her to take that step in the first place, and to hear what it’s like—being a real-life mermaid.

When did you fall in love with mermaids?

I didn’t have the ocean as part of my life when I was growing up, but I was always drawing pictures of mermaids and the ocean. As soon as I could draw stick figures I gave them mermaid tails. I remember going to the library when I was a kid to research how and where I could find mermaids myself! There was no internet then, and all I could find was Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*. I remember thinking, “I’m sure they’re real. Why isn’t there more information?!” When I saw the film *Splash*, I realized I could make a tail and swim in it. It didn’t have to be a fantasy in my head, I could actually embody it, in real life. So I was completely obsessed. I had pictures of Daryl Hannah’s “Madison” character all over my room, and created my first mermaid tail when I was nine. The tail was orange, black, and gold with sparkles. My friends laughed but always wanted to swim with me in our pool. This love was definitely engrained in me from some other place.

So you’ve been making tails ever since?

It wasn’t until 2003 that I made a tail again. That first childhood tail lasted months and months before it disintegrated. But I remained obsessed with mermaids and when I got older I made a living as a fantasy artist; mermaids, of course, figured heavily in my art. I’m really into visionary art that expands the mind and pushes the boundaries of reality. I have a lot of artwork that I look at now and realize that I have nearly identical mermaid photographs of myself in the same poses, with the same look. I ended up completely embodying my artwork, becoming my vision in real life.

My first adult tail was a bit of a mishmash on the inside ... flippers, duct tape, coat hangers, and a couple of boomerangs to create the wide fluke shape (I was a true “Aussie” mermaid!). Then I decided to create a more professional monofin for myself, which took lots of research and development. I didn’t realize that I could buy a proper monofin from a company! I cut a polyethylene board and bolted, shaved down, and shaped flippers onto it so I could get the entire construction streamlined. It was all from scratch, and has evolved over time to a point where I’ve figured out the best thickness and width for strength, maneuverability, and functionality. Now I use FINIS monofins as they are durable, flexible, and strong, and I add a neoprene covering, with hundreds of thousands of tiny scales hand-sewn on in shimmering patterns. The process takes over four months of full-time work.

What is it that made you take that leap, from art to real life?

I was doing a lot of modeling throughout my 20s, and I was hired at one point to do an underwater shoot in a dive pool. The photographs were so amazing! Of course I wasn’t wearing a tail, it was just a modeling shoot. I looked at the photos and recognized the energy I was trying to develop in myself—in my art, in my modeling, and in how I dance. I thought





I looked so much better underwater. If I'd been wearing a tail, the photos would have been perfect! So I decided to make a tail.

I had an amateur underwater videographer friend who was doing an eco-conservation documentary project for a polluted river estuary where I lived. He wanted to shoot some footage of me underwater, and although it was pretty bad quality and my tail wasn't really functioning well, as soon as I swam underwater with that tail, I thought "this has got to happen." So I continued creating the tails. I was able to host the eco-conservation river clean-up documentary film, sharing information about the issues affecting our water. The instant I saw that my mermaid modeling passion could connect and meld with how much I cared for the environment, I was excited and inspired.

At that time, I was married to surfer Dave Rastovich and had the opportunity to travel to incredible places with him, like Tahiti, Fiji, and Hawaii. So there I was at these gorgeous places with my mermaid tail trying to tempt the film guys who had underwater housings on their cameras to take photos of me in the ocean. I would say, "Come on, the surf's flat, let's go!" Once I started getting a portfolio together, a couple of surf magazines published some of the photos and the response was really amazing.

More opportunities to combine the mermaid persona with activism began to present themselves in my hometown of Byron Bay, Australia. The Roads & Traffic Authority proposed to build a new, larger bridge that created a negative ecological impact on the river way. There was a large community rally against it on the bridge itself with protestors stopping traffic. I put my mermaid tail on and had myself carried to the middle of the bridge. It made front page news

because when the police came to remove people, they didn't know what to do with me. They told me to get up and walk away, which, of course, wasn't possible for me to do as a mermaid! They didn't want photos of policemen physically dragging a mermaid off the bridge, so I was the last protestor standing. Well, sitting and flapping.

When did you actually start performing as a mermaid?

About a year after I created that first tail, I had a great portfolio and many beautiful photos, but I hadn't been paid. It was my passion, but not a career. Other people benefitted from what I had created and I realized that this passion could support me as well. I issued a press release stating that I was a professional mermaid and that I flew around the world to perform underwater.

As soon as I "owned it" and "claimed my goal," the offers began pouring in. I started with appearances at aquariums. I was the face of the campaign for the *Little Mermaid* film promotion at the Melbourne Aquarium where kids could come to see a real mermaid swimming in the shark tank. I also led the "welcoming party" for the Sydney Aquarium when two new manatees arrived. I flew to the Siam Thailand Aquarium for a week-long mermaid campaign and promotion and did a bunch of television commercials and newspaper articles, performing in their tank.

Once things started rolling, I had many opportunities: TV commercials, photo shoots, events, performances, and eco-activism. I've travelled all over the world being a mermaid. But the experiences that have been most dear to my heart have been with friends, swimming and filming in the ocean with no thought of profit or what could even come of it.

One of those experiences involved you swimming with humpback whales in the open ocean. The video is incredible! Can you tell me what that was like?

Some friends and I went to Tonga in the South Pacific to swim with the whales and create some amazing footage. We'd been heavily campaigning to end whaling and dolphin slaughter and we wanted to have a positive connection with the creatures we spent so much time trying to protect. We had overcome many obstacles involving timing, boat issues, permits, and weather to be in the right place at the right time, and on the last day it seemed like it had all been in vain ...

But then, in the last few hours of our trip, a mother, her calf, and an escort whale showed up and wanted to play. If whales don't want to hang out with you they can simply dive deep and they're gone. Fortunately, these whales were curious. The baby whale was fascinated by me and my tail. It kept swimming up to the surface and eyeballing me. It would spread its wingtip fin toward me, just out of reach. I could see it looking at me and it was such a powerful experience, being next to this baby whale who had just been born into the world and was already the size of a bus!

When you're swimming way out in the ocean on a clear day, you can see gorgeous rays of sunlight shooting down into the endless depths. I saw a huge mammoth whale swimming upward, underneath me, getting larger and larger and I suddenly realized I didn't know which way to swim! I could end up in this whale's blowhole or its mouth! I didn't know what to do. But the whales were so aware—of their size and where I was and what I was doing. This whale swam to within a couple of feet of me. It was amazing how aware it was of its effect on me, right down to the swishing of its tail. You can feel that intelligence emanating from them. You look them in the eye and there's an amazing consciousness.

Then the whales started singing to each other. It was mind-blowing. The big mama's song was so deep and rumbling. It was like standing in front of the hugest speaker stack in the world at a massive rock concert where your ribs vibrate. I felt like it was rearranging my DNA molecules; reverberating through every cell in my body. The baby whale was singing

in such high-pitched trumpeting notes that it was nearly too loud and too high pitched for my ears to handle. Water carries sound and you feel it coming from every angle.

When we got back in the boat we were crying. The emotional release was powerful and I knew at that moment that I would put my life on the line to protect these creatures. I felt grateful that after hundreds of years of humans decimating their species, they're still so curious and show so much joy and curiosity. On our way back from that dive, another young whale followed our boat and kept breaching, jumping, leaping out of the water, seemingly so full of joy to be alive, until it couldn't jump anymore.

Can you tell me about swimming with sharks?

A couple of years ago, I swam with 14-foot great white sharks off the Guadalupe Island in Mexico for a TV special. It was an incredible opportunity to face all of my fears. Although I'd been swimming as a mermaid for quite a few years I'd never seen a shark, and of course that's the first question everyone asks: "Aren't you afraid of sharks?" And I always replied, "Well, yeah, but that's not going to stop me from following my passion!" So when I had this opportunity to swim with sharks, I thought, "This is the moment, if you want to be a real mermaid!" I threw myself in the deep end, and as far as I know I was the first mermaid to ever be filmed swimming with great white sharks in the wild, with no cage—wearing a tail, breath-holding, and with no safety gear.

I asked the scientists we were with what I should do if a shark approached me. They responded that sharks are just like wild dogs. "You have to show them who's boss," they said. "Just don't turn tail and run away, because then their predatory instincts become aroused. Just show them who's boss." How would I do that, I wondered, or even remember to do that with a great white shark coming at me?

There were divers equipped with spear guns nearby, but in reality I'm so much faster in my tail than anyone else, especially if they're wearing dive gear. To get the best photo I had to be away from the divers, alone with the sharks. I took off, the divers way behind me, and a shark started swimming directly toward me. Everything slowed down to that one



Hannah's Ocean Activism

Hannah is a passionate ocean activist, and regularly educates audiences on ocean conservation. In 2007 she co-organized a “paddle-out” against Japanese dolphin slaughter, during which a group of activists attempted to shield dolphins being slaughtered in Taiji, Japan. This became one of the first actions to raise attention on dolphin killings in Japan and was later featured in the Oscar-winning documentary The Cove. When I asked Hannah what her main message was as a mermaid, she had this to say:

“*The ocean is our life blood. If we mess it up with pollution, overfishing, and killing these incredible species that hold the knowledge and the wisdom of the ocean, it’s only a matter of years before the rest of civilization crumbles. We can’t survive without the ocean. It’s the womb of the world. We are 70 percent water. We can no longer pretend that we’re just these land-based creatures and that we don’t have a completely symbiotic relationship with the ocean.*”

drawn-out moment in time. My brain was racing. I thought, “Okay, what am I gonna do? That’s right, I have to show it who’s boss!” I stretched my arms out wide and started screaming, under the water, while swimming directly at it. “Come on! I’ll take you ON!” Of course, it sounded more like, “*blup, blup, blup.*” The shark changed direction and took off. I scared off a 14-foot great white shark! Whenever I’m faced with a scary situation in life, I remember that and know I can handle anything.

You had a run-in with sharks more recently, didn’t you?

I was swimming with Per Peterson, an underwater film guy. We shot in freshwater rivers in Florida with manatees, at Weeki Wachee Springs, and then at Atlantis in the Bahamas, where I work. On the last day we filmed around an open-ocean shipwreck with black-tipped Caribbean reef sharks. In the Bahamas, divers go down wearing chainmail suits and feed the reef sharks by hand. The sharks are used to being fed by humans, they know where dinner’s served—and yet they’re completely wild in the open ocean.

I was getting in my tail and thought, “I swam with 14-foot great white sharks, this is no big deal!” The divers told me to swim with my hands



at my side; otherwise the sharks might come looking for food and bite my hands right off. I wasn’t feeling so comfortable after that. The divers were all wearing full-body chainmail and I was half naked in a fish suit. That’s when it occurred to me that this might be just a little bit insane.

We descended 40 feet and there were sharks swarming all around me. They’re very comfortable with humans and swam a lot closer than the great white sharks ever did. Suddenly, I felt a pulling back and forth on my tail. I looked down and a shark was nibbling on it! I later saw the photo of the shark actually taking a bite out of my tail. The shark looks so cute and friendly, holding my tail gently in its mouth with a cute grin on its face!

What was it like swimming with whale sharks? And with manta rays and dolphins?

Swimming with whale sharks is one of the best things for challenging our preconceived ideas of the ocean. The whale shark is the largest shark in the world, measuring around 20 feet. They can definitely be misinterpreted as the mystical “beasts” of the deep. When I first saw one coming toward me, my heart was pounding. It was so massive! But they’re actually harmless, docile, and graceful creatures. They only eat



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tiny shrimp and have no teeth! They're really calm and beautiful to interact with.

Oh, and the manta rays! It's like being in contact with alien creatures. They're the most glorious, graceful beings under the sea. They're very relaxed, smooth, and aquiline. I envy them; I want to be as graceful as they are! I have footage where I'm swimming upside down, belly to belly, with a 13-foot manta ray, blowing bubbles onto its tummy. As long as they're not feeling threatened, as long as you're simply a part of what's going on, they're happy to hang out with you.

Swimming with dolphins in Hawaii was also a beautiful experience. I swam with a pod of over 400 spinner dolphins! They were diving, squealing, and zapping me with sonar from every angle. At first they seemed wary of my big flapping tail and then they got used to me—and allowed me to join their pod!

Do you still draw and create fantasy art?

I don't spend much time drawing anymore. I get this rush from swimming that used to take me hours to put in pictures. What I'm doing now allows me to connect with people and see joy on their faces.

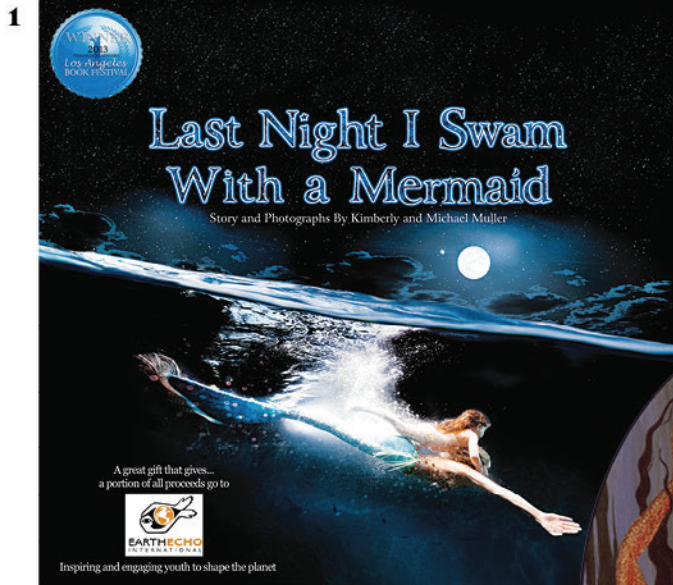
I love to be active and surrounded by people, and I love participating in large, collaborative projects. My focus has shifted but the passion is still the same, whatever I create.

Creating the tails is a full-time job, too. I design all of my tails and the endless hours that I would have once spent drawing are now redirected into 3-D mermaid tail creations. It's all art.

You're such an inspiration, and must hear from a lot of fans. What do you think of all the mermaids who have followed you and look up to you?

The explosion of interest in mermaids is amazing. I receive emails daily, with people saying things like, "How do you make mermaid tails, how do you do what you do, tell me how to become a professional mermaid." It's a great feeling to have inspired so many people. I'm re-inspired every day by seeing others who have the same passion and love the beauty of the ocean.

All I've ever wanted to do was inspire people to live their dreams, whatever they may be. I want to show others that if you're continually passionate about what you believe in, anything is possible!



1 LAST NIGHT I SWAM WITH A MERMAID is a magical tale spun by author Kimberly Muller and brought to life by her husband, world-renowned photographer Michael Muller. A young girl meets a beautiful mermaid who takes her on an enchanted ocean journey and teaches her a valuable lesson: that we must “respect, protect, and not expect” from our planet and one another. Lastnightiswamwithamermaid.com.

2 OCEAN is the East Coast’s premiere Celtic fusion band, with a live show *The Washington Post* calls “nothing short of spellbinding.” Powered by the soaring vocals of Lisa Moscatiello and the creative genius of composer/arranger Jennifer Cutting, OCEAN is known for their electrifying stage presence, innovative arrangements, and ability to move from ethereal to high-energy in a heartbeat! Oceanorchestra.com.

3 MERNETWORK, created in 2010, is the world’s largest forum for mermaids and mermen. With helpful tailmaker reviews, a directory of tailmaking tutorials and how-to guides, regional forums for pods of merfolk to connect with local mers, and a forum for talking about anything and everything merfolk, MerNetwork is a great destination for everyone from amateurs to professionals. Mernetwork.com.

4 DAME DARCY is an artist whose *Meat Cake* comic has been published by Fantagraphics since 1993. She’s released several graphic novels, including her latest, *Handbook for Hot Witches*, and regularly exhibits her illustrations, paintings, and handcrafted dolls throughout the world. She also creates mystical mermaid tarot decks and games, and occasionally performs in a tail. Join Dame Darcy’s community to find out about more fun! DameDarcy.com.

5 SASHA THE FIRE GYPSY is a talented and versatile performer specializing in Fire Performance, Aerial, Mermaid, Grinder, Sideshow, and Circus acts. Fire Gypsy Productions has many talented performers and can provide entertainment for any event. Based in New York, but travels anywhere. Setting the world on fire one event at a time. Firegypsy.com.

SERULIA

Francesca Lia Block

When her boyfriend Jordan was killed in a surfing accident, Casey began taking a new antidepressant called Serulia. She had stopped eating and her hipbones jutted out at hard angles; her breasts were gone. At night she lay awake in the blue and white beachfront Venice bungalow she had shared with Jordan, listening for his voice in the furious scraping of the pale orange bougainvillea at the windows and the hush of the not-too-distant waves. She had not swept the wooden floorboards in weeks to keep present the particles of sand that had once clung to his big feet. She would not wash his clothing but lie with her face in his dirty pale blue cotton hoodie every night. The food he'd bought—hummus and pita and grapes and organic yogurt—rotted in the refrigerator. The wildflowers he'd picked for her stank in the old Chianti bottle they used for the bouquets they took turns giving one another.

There had been hundreds of people on Billy Deerpark's boat for the funeral. Casey wore the black cotton halter dress Jordan had bought for her when they first met and she told him she didn't own a single dress but liked this one—hanging from the makeshift booth on the boardwalk. The boat sailed out into the Marina and Casey scattered Jordan's ashes into the sea. Strange he could fit into the urn, such a tall, strong man. The ashes weren't what she'd thought—pale, soft, and powdery—they were dark with tiny bits of bone. Casey did not want to touch them but she forced herself. When she came home she vomited in the toilet, without Jordan's hands to hold back her hair, splashed her face, and went to bed. *That wasn't really him*, she thought. *He's still in the water; he's become something else.*

At last Casey forced herself to call her gynecologist, who prescribed the drug over the phone, knowing Casey was too depressed to come into his office let alone meet with a psychiatrist. The doctor was being compassionate, if thoughtless, as the drug had just recently appeared on the market and had a number of known side effects that the sultry-voiced woman in the commercial enumerated while newly happy people who were actually generally happy un-medicated actors cavorted on the screen, skipping along the beach, playing with dogs and children, having backyard barbecues, and generally exuding joy and good health from their every pore.

Jordan and Casey met at a party on the Fourth of July five years ago. She was 19 and he was 22. Sitting around a bonfire sharing a beer. Huddling together, his blue sweatshirt around her shoulders, firelight on their faces, the sky explosive. She couldn't remember what they talked about; it didn't matter. She went home with him that night and never left, the way everyone wishes love would be.

The Serulia began to work right away. After three doses, Casey

got out of bed and did some dishes, ate some dry cereal, threw away the old food in the refrigerator. The next day she swept and did laundry. She even took a walk on the third day but her legs felt weak and her feet hurt.

The skin on her lower body became dry and flaky, no matter how much aloe and coconut oil she smeared onto it. She gained weight in her hips almost immediately, though she was eating the same amount as before Jordan's death. Weirdly, while she was taking a bath, she noticed a thin web of skin growing between her toes. Or had it always been like that? It was so small and translucent; maybe she hadn't noticed? But when a small permeable membrane grew between her legs, too, she worried and went to the doctor.

"Someday I want kids," Jordan asked. "Do you want kids?"

"Yes," she said. "With you. Six kids."

"Whoa," he laughed. "Whoa baby. Baby baby baby. Oh, Casey. Oh."

The kids would have been blonde and brown-skinned with green-flecked eyes, long blonde legs, big feet. They would have loved the ocean. Their father would have taught them how to surf. Their mother would never have worried when he took them out because if there had been six children the accident would never have happened.

The doctor, who would have been Casey's OB if she'd had a child with Jordan, was silent during the entire exam, not a word. Casey's heart got stuck in her throat like a piece of poison apple and she couldn't stop shaking. He told her to dress and meet him in his office. There were files stacked on the desk and framed photographs of his six gorgeous children lined up on the wooden shelves behind him.

"I have to tell you, Casey. I've never seen anything like this before. We'll need to take you off the prescription immediately and see it if all resolves. Meanwhile I can prescribe some Ativan."

It became clear to her then, looking at the doctor and his six beautiful children, that she did not care if she turned dry and couldn't walk and became sealed up. It was what she wanted. Luckily she still had 15 pills left.

Casey drove home and hobbled up to the door of the bungalow. She went inside and took off all her clothes and put on the black halter dress and then, when night came, she hobbled down to the sea. She took the small orange canister of pills with her name written on it and a bottle of water. She downed all the pills and walked across the scraping sand and out into the surf. A wave was coming, cold and blinding. Casey closed her eyes and dove into it to meet him.

Francesca Lia Block is the award-winning author of numerous books including *Dangerous Angels*; *The Weetzie* *Bat Books*, *The Elementals*, and her latest, *Love In the Time of Global Warming*. Learn more at Francescaliablock.com.

MERMAIDS R US

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue mermaid costume with a matching top and long tail, is swimming underwater. She is holding a microphone in her right hand and has her left hand raised. The background is dark blue with some light filtering through the water.

MERMAIDS R US prides itself on creating the very highest quality mermaid products to fit all your mermaid needs—from shooting high-end special effects music videos to just swimming in your backyard pool. Its realistic silicone tails are made to withstand the sea, fresh water, and chlorinated pools, and include a stretch liner to make any mermaid or merman comfortable during long swims.

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mermaid Portfolio workshops

A large whale shark is swimming underwater, moving from left to right. In the foreground, a mermaid with a colorful, iridescent tail is swimming towards the right. The water is clear blue with some light rays visible.

Summer 2014 - 4 Sessions

Exuma Cays - Bahamas Islands
Cenotes - Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico
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For more information, see Facebook "Mermaid Portfolio Workshops" or eMail chris@chrisrumley.com

Tim Gunn **ON MERMAID FASHION**

Do you feel that mermaids and mermaidly allure have a place in today's fashion world?

When we consider the catalysts that are essential for inspiration in the fashion industry, few have the staying power or the potency of mermaids, owing largely to the fact that mermaids have been part of world literature, lore, art, and artifact for such a very long time. There will always be a place for mermaid-inspired fashion, providing that the designs are conceived in a manner that's relevant to the current moment.

In what ways do you think that women can add mermaidly allure to their own wardrobes?

Mermaids aren't afraid to show off their curves and celebrate their gender. This is what gives them such extraordinary allure, at least in my humble view. There's a fashion lesson in this: dress for your curves and your womanliness, wear clothes that fit well, and walk—or swim—with confidence. Finally, never turn down a sequin or paillette.

What do you think of the mermaid dress? Do you have any favorite examples?

The mermaid dress is, by definition, about drama; form-fitting from bust to knee (and usually strapless) and with a cascading burst of fabric from the knee to the floor. You find them in abundance on the red carpet and some of the most beautiful are by Marchesa. But my favorite mermaid-inspired garment is the mermaid sheath, which was introduced in the late '60s by the legendary Norman Norell. His sequin-covered gown quickly became an American fashion classic.

Can you describe any other mermaid-inspired fashion? What did you think of Gaultier's 2008 collection, for example?

Gaultier is ever the showman. I found his fall 2008 couture collection to be expectedly over-the-top and, frankly, entirely too literal and, therefore, costumey for my taste. However, the look from the collection that Marion Cotillard wore to the Academy Awards was stunning. (For me, evaluating fashion is all about context; who's wearing it and for what purpose.) And owing to the fact that Ms. Cotillard won an Oscar that year, Gaultier's dress received a lot of attention, a lot of very positive attention.

What do you think the appeal of mermaids is in general? Are you yourself a fan?

I'm a huge fan of mermaids (and mermen for that matter), because their place in art and literature is so long-standing (3,000 years!) and crosses every culture and region of the globe. There will always be a fascination with creatures that transcend the world as we know it, and mermaids are among the more accessible of those creatures.

Do you think there is any place for mermen in the fashion world, and do you have any advice for aspiring mermen who might be feeling a bit overlooked?

I always say that fashion is so much easier for men than it is for women, but I need to recalibrate that thought when it comes to mermen, because it strikes me that they pose more of a fashion challenge than mermaids. Fortunately, a merman's fashion need only be addressed from the waist up. This means that plenty of options are available, from a classic polo shirt to a full-on tuxedo (minus pants, of course). Though we must be reminded that color options for a merman's apparel should be informed by the color of his flesh and scales.

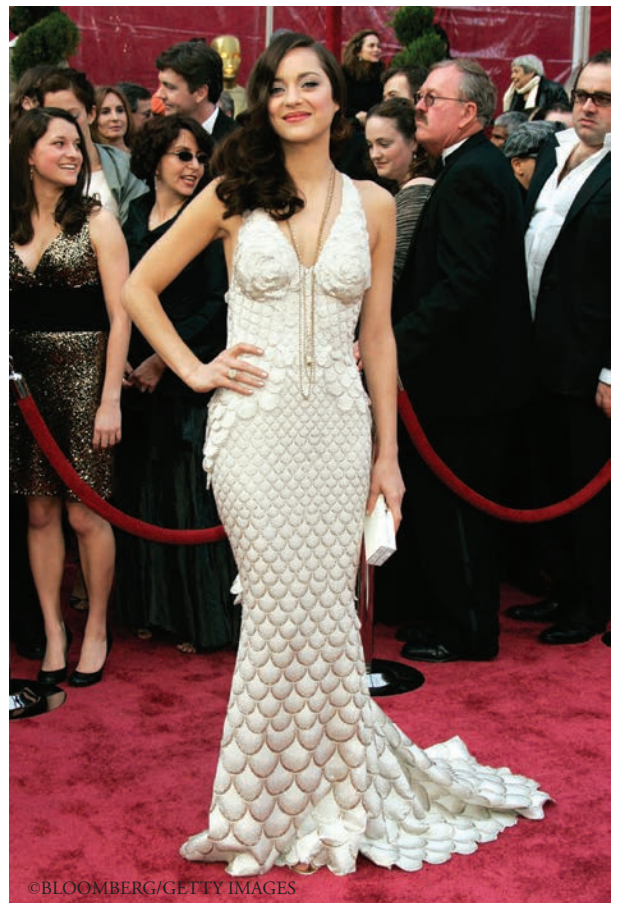
Do you have any advice for aspiring mermaids (and mermen)?

Advice? Don't let the world aquatic compromise your personal style and ... practice holding your breath.

INTERVIEWED BY CAROLYN TURGEON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LIFETIME TELEVISION



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Aimee Bender

THE MERMAID'S JOB

the mermaid went to the office to learn how to type. She had idealized much about the human world, and for some reason typing was at the top of her list—she enjoyed books so, even wet and slurry-worded, and once she'd figured out how the words had arrived on the page, she wanted to train her hands to do that. She did not care a whit about content, and was happy to type anything, really, which was good news for the company that hired her, which had volumes of handwritten instructions from the elderly owner who loved her own cursive as much as she loved her own children. Those loopy letters, the perfectly staged words upon lined paper. At the office stood the stacks of pages, pages that had been sitting on a desk for over four months now, and the cursive was adept and pretty but to translate all of those pages to a computer seemed to most like quitting if asked. The mermaid, contrarily, wept with joy when she saw the stacks—her purple eyes filled with the kind of tears that oceans were made from, small birthings of oceans that the office workers looked at with wonder. One even swore he saw tiny bits of kelp in her giant tears, and if caught inside a teacup, as they did on the second day, recreating the same moment just now with a ready teacup so they could seize it—(Here are your stacks! We're so grateful! Here they are! All for you!)—pressing the cup to her cheek, she so bewildered still by the human world that she stood still for it, weeping slightly from confusion this time—when captured this way, they walked the cup briskly to the kitchenette and in a crowd of heads, peered inside. One of the office workers pointed at a dot that she swore was an early tadpole, and the following day, a microscope borrowed from a son's biology kit confirmed the kelp. We cry saltwater, they murmured, but she truly cries from the ocean. She is from the ocean, they told each other, solemnly; they knew already, but you can know in one way and then later know in another, deeper way, and they shuffled back to their desks with a gentleness in their movements and awe.

She did not need water but they gave her a trough of it anyway, filled carefully with water that was not filtered, as they thought a mermaid might eschew filtered water, mineral-free, over-stripped, and they sprinkled it with the kosher salt they had in their kitchenette because it had been the largest carton available and they'd heard it was good on food. Sea salt would be better, one whispered to another, but they hadn't time to run to the store, and they'd heard sea salt was expensive, plus the mermaid just nodded at their efforts and hadn't seemed disappointed or enthralled either way. She didn't talk much, if at all. In fact, no one had heard her speak a single word. She was interested in people, but she had seen so many tragedies and arguments on boats, and ships, and rafts, and liners, that she was afraid of people, too, and more interested in this typing. She worked her lessons, and true, the first few days were slow, and she only translated three pages over tens of hours, but she picked it up quick, and by the second week she was flying through pages and just laughing and laughing, seeing the scooped and fragile lettering show up so strong and boxy on the screen. She had no interest in email, the internet, or any games. She kept her tail lightly in the trough out of politeness but her scales glittered with health and she could last on land for three weeks without any symptoms and as long as she took a dip on occasion all was well. As for walking, that was the hard part, but with crutches and some expert balancing, she seemed to be fine. She had the mightiness of the beautiful unusual about her.

The disappointment for the office workers was how she was far more interested in language than in those who had invented it—or our ancestors, they amended, at the bar, since not one of them could recall ever making up a word before. A book is a human endeavor! they reminded each other, sipping highballs of whiskey as if they were underage and about to be caught. They awaited her arrival each morning and if the tears seemed close, they ran over with a fresh teacup and



caught those little oceans, lining them up on the kitchenette linoleum counter with index card labels of the date. In one was a sure tadpole; in another, a plankton; in a third a sliver of coral. Oh, they said, taking turns at the microscope. Oh. They could best see her beauty in these small cupped ways.

After she did all the pages, she left. On her last day, the mermaid waved a general goodbye on her crutches, took the elevator down, and hailed a cab even though she carried no cash and had no purse, and always wore that blousy pocketless shirt with the nearly see-through blueness that had driven men and women a little nuts with distraction—not just the hint of those mermaid breasts but the blue she had chosen, the blue!—it was beyond blue; it was the clearness and openness of sailing and freedom. A shirt like that could talk any cabbie into driving her to the ocean for free, just to be near her, and then she gave a nice thank you by smiling, and hobbled down the sand. At the shoreline, she stacked her crutches neatly, one atop the other, and sat herself down and crawled, crab-like, into the water on her hands.

Children stopped to watch. It was on the news, which the office workers had watched while in the kitchenette, standing protectively over their droplets of ocean. It was a moment for all, when the wave reached up and took her, and she merged with it as comfortably as we walk, and she floated off, splashing, playing with a few children, her fingers high in the air typing letters in a message that took so long to decipher—the code-breakers had to mark her fingers and tap out the letters and watch the video over and over in the hopes that she was sending a heartfelt goodbye to her land cousins until they realized all she was saying was stuff she had typed: *Please put all letters in the letter pile. Please deposit your work check within a week or our banking system will not work as effectively. Please send your change of address within a month of moving.*

And then she dipped her hair into the water and arched herself downward and a flip of the tail and gone.

The guppies in the cups did grow. After a couple weeks, they too had to be taken to the ocean and the office workers did it as a group. It was so awkward, sometimes, being human, in their suits and vests and the rolling up of pants which would have to go to the dry cleaner now, and the careful balancing of all those mugs between them. They dipped the cups carefully in the foam, and hoped the guppies and ferns were escaping and reveling but it was too small to see. Go on! they waved. Go home, go home! They stood and looked out over the water. It was all very blue, and they could see nothing but sailboats and pelicans, diving fast in straight bombs to gulp down a fish. They stood in their limbfulness with empty cups until a child's voice behind them asked if they would help fill a moat.

Please? said the child. I made it too far.

She had an elaborate castle built, with wet sand dripped turrets and tunnels and pathways, but no finger of water had reached up to touch it. The office workers went back and forth a few times, pouring frothy water from the cups and watching as it swayed and leveled in the moat.

The castle is safe now, said the child, looking up with bright eyes, and only then did any of the office workers feel any sadness that it was over, and that the office would return to regular, and the trough recycled, and the desk prepared for a new temp worker, and the cups washed and dried and shelved for coffee and tea, and their tears just an echo of that primordial time when we grew our feet and climbed out of the water.

Aimee Bender is the author of several books, including *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake* and her latest, *The Color Master: Stories*. Visit Flammableskirt.com.



David Helvarg

**TO IMAGINE MERMAIDS
IMAGINE HEALTHY SEAS
and THEN WORK to MAKE THEM TRUE**



Thinking about what would make a suitable habitat for a mermaid, I have to suspect that it'd be similar to the habitat required by other large fin-footed marine mammals such as pinnipeds (seals and sea lions) or smooth-skinned highly vocal water mammals like dolphins.

A mermaid would require healthy breeding and nursery grounds such as mangrove forests or coral reefs; sufficient prey and forage fish; clean unpolluted waters with the proper mix of nutrients, clarity, salinity, and temperature; and at least some protected reserves such as the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in Northwest Hawaii that stretches over 1,200 miles and contains over 70 percent of US corals along with a number of endangered species including Hawaiian monk seals and green sea turtles. This is a part of the sea where no extractive use, drilling, fishing, or mining is allowed.

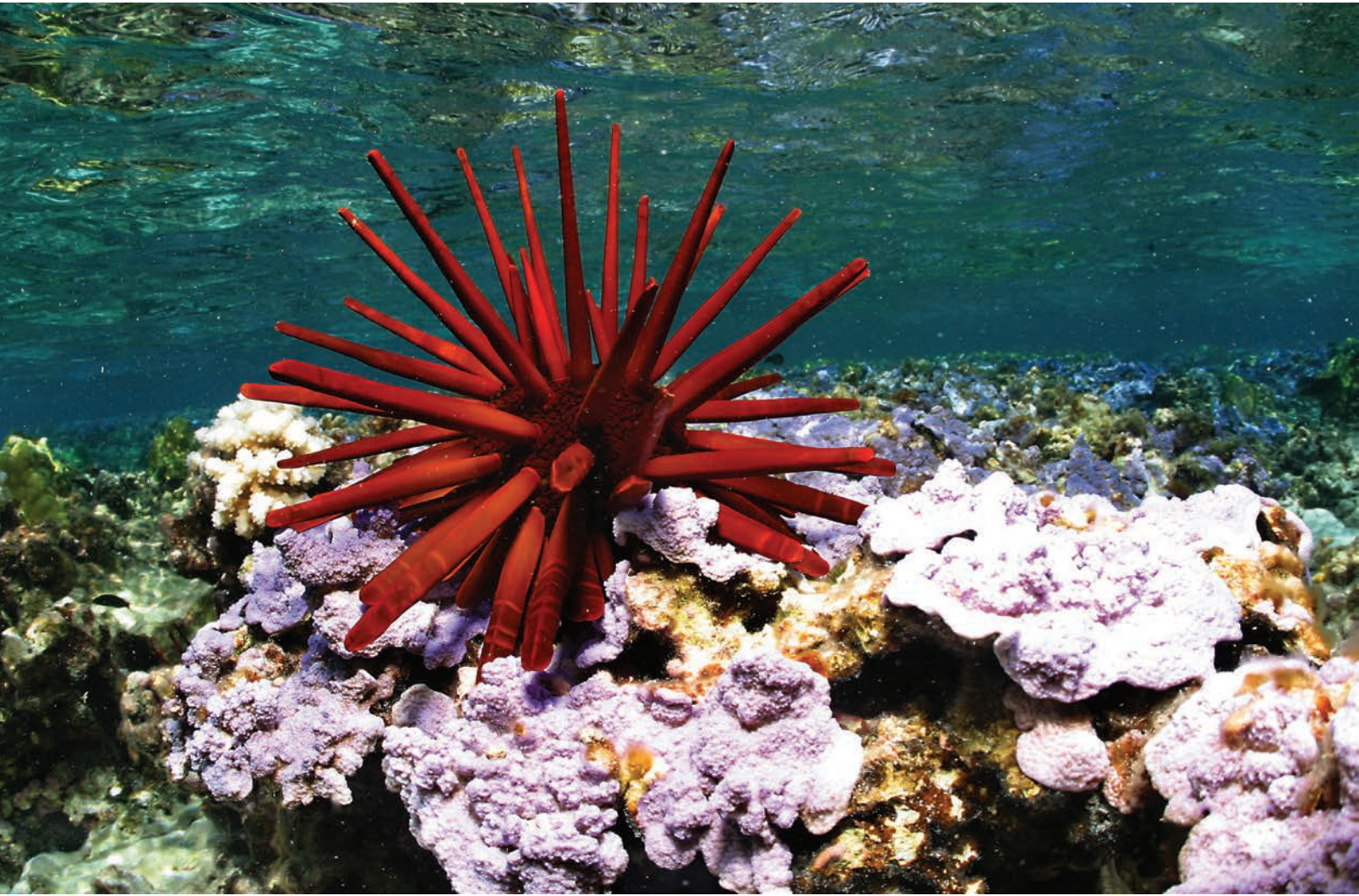
And might there be mermaids there? It's tough to sustain hope for the creatures of our imaginations when we're doing such a miserable job sustaining the living wonders of today's threatened seas including Tasmanian sea dragons and narwhales—the unicorns of the sea, threatened by loss of Arctic sea ice linked to climate change.

According to a report issued by the International Programme on the State of the Oceans (IPSO), a global panel of marine experts that met at Oxford University, we are “at high risk for entering a phase of extinction of marine species unprecedented in human history.”

This follows similar reports including one in 2003 in the journal *Nature* that 90 percent of the biggest pelagic (open ocean) fish have been wiped out just since 1950. “From giant blue marlin to mighty bluefin tuna, and from tropical groupers to Antarctic cod, industrial fishing has scoured the global ocean. There is no blue frontier left,” wrote the late Ransom Myers, the lead author of that study. In 2008 researchers working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) found more than 40 percent of the world's oceans are heavily degraded by human activities, including overfishing and pollution, while only four percent remain in a pristine state.

The threat is cumulative and comes from a series of cascading disasters taking place across our blue marble planet. We know what these problems are: industrial overfishing for the global seafood market; urban and industrial runoff, including plastic, oil, and sewage; coastal sprawl that's bulldozing over the salt marshes and wetlands that act as the filters and nurseries of the sea; and of course fossil-fuel-fired climate change that's raising sea levels, bleaching corals, melting Arctic ice, and altering the basic chemistry of the sea through acidification. Ocean acidification results from the ocean absorbing extra anthropogenic (human originated) carbon from the atmosphere on top of the 2.5 billion tons a year it scrubs naturally and so increasing the amount of carbonic acid in the sea. The effect of that is it makes it harder for shell-forming critters—from certain planktons to clams to corals—to extract calcium carbonate out of seawater to build their protective bodies and homes.

What's frustrating is that we know what the solutions are. If you stop killing fish they tend to grow back. We can use less plastic and clean up our polluted runoff before it hits the shoreline. We can invest in renewable energy for the future. I've witnessed oil disasters firsthand from the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico,



where I flew low over 100 dolphins and a humpback whale trapped and dying in BP's petroleum, to the Persian Gulf, where I rode with sailors guarding Iraqi oil terminals in 2007, investing our nation's youth and treasure to feed our energy addiction, to my own home marina in Richmond, California, where a spill of toxic bunker fuel that same year left oiled birds stranded and dead behind my house. One thing about carbon-free alternative energy is that no wind spill ever destroyed a Louisiana bayou.

What's needed is a marine grassroots citizens' movement that can overcome saltwater special interests like offshore oil and gas or coastal real-estate speculators. What's needed is a bottom-up seaweed rebellion to protect and restore the last great commons on our living blue planet.

I discovered a problem, however, after I wrote my first ocean book, *Blue Frontier*, about the crisis in our seas and recycled it into the non-profit Blue Frontier Campaign. I'd be out giving talks about the challenges we face and people would come up afterward to wish me luck, saying they also wished they could do something but explaining that they had full-time jobs and families to raise or were looking for jobs or had classes to attend. Besides, how could one individual impact huge problems like the collapse of marine wildlife or climate change? The answer, of course, is that we are already having an impact. Everything we do each day affects the seas around us, from the cars we drive to the things we do when we snorkel or dive. The only real question is, will we be conscious of our impact and then make the right choices to help heal the ocean?

So I wrote a new book, *50 Ways to Save the Ocean*, to offer people options. It has a foreword by third-generation ocean explorer Philippe Cousteau and an illustrated fish and crab duo (Finley and Clawdia) drawn by *Sherman's Lagoon* cartoonist Jim Toomey. It explains in simple, fact-based chapters how, by making right choices for the sea, you also tend to do the right thing for yourself, for your health ("Eat Organic and Vegetarian Foods"), your pocketbook ("Drive a Fuel-Efficient Car, Join a Carpool or Use Public Transit"), even your sense of well-being ("Talk About the Ocean in Your Place of Worship"). The number one thing to do is "Go to the Beach" because you're more likely to protect the places that you love.

The book also highlights how things that you may not think of as being tied to the sea can actually have a huge impact on it. Take energy conservation. More than 40 percent of the electric power generated in the United States comes from coal-fired power plants. California, by contrast, is a state where over 90 percent of the power plants use less carbon intense natural gas and most of the rest of the mix is from renewable energies. California in fact is a model of how to live well by the sea, and the subject of my latest book, *The Golden Shore – California's Love Affair with the Sea*. Coal plants, as I was saying, release both sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, which create smog and acid rain. Rainfall washes these pollutants into rivers, bays, and the sea, where they contribute to oxygen-depleted dead zones. Coal-generated power plants also release mercury, a neurotoxin that accumulates through the food web and concentrates as methyl mercury in the flesh of top ocean

predator fish like halibut, tuna, and swordfish, becoming a health risk for both marine life and seafood consumers, particularly pregnant women, as even tiny amounts of mercury can impact the neurological development of the human fetus in utero.

In addition, burning coal adds a huge amount of climate-warming carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Global warming, in turn, is causing sea-level rise and changing the ocean's temperature and chemistry. Other fossil fuels used to generate energy—like diesel oil and natural gas—also contribute to global warming and pollution. Along with encouraging the reader to campaign for safe clean-energy alternatives, the book also explains in clear language and simple bullet points how we can each reduce our energy footprint in ways that saves money and the sea.

Margo Pellegrino is what the Blue Frontier Campaign calls a seaweed rebel, a marine grassroots citizen-activist doing something to turn the tide to prevent the ocean's decline. In 2007 Margo, a dedicated athlete, paddler, and New Jersey mom of two cute kids, Billy and Julia, read *50 Ways to Save the Ocean* and decided to make cleaning up the ocean her cause.

Since then, with support from her kids and husband Carl, she's made three epic voyages by outrigger canoe: from Miami to Maine in 2007, from Miami to New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico in 2009, and along the Pacific coast from Seattle to San Diego in 2010. Almost every time she pulled ashore she met with local coastal activists including surfers, scientists, fishermen and women, home owners, and paddlers like herself, all working to improve the quality of our seas. She also helped raise attention in the media and elsewhere about their work and the idea that healthy oceans promote healthy economies and communities.

Another of Blue Frontier's ocean explorers is Roz Savage, a British adventurer and blond force of nature who rowed the Atlantic solo before becoming the first woman to row solo across the Pacific to raise awareness of ocean conservation and climate issues. In 2012 she rowed solo across the Indian Ocean from Australia, becoming the only woman and one of only two people to solo row the world's three major oceans.

I figure if Margo and Roz can paddle or row whole continents and oceans to help save the seas, each of us can at least bring our own cloth bags to the grocery store so that another single-use plastic bag doesn't end up choking some sea turtle or albatross (we can also get involved in widespread campaigns to either ban or charge for single-use plastic packaging). Great adventures and uprisings can create epic moments but history is also about the things we do every day.

So for many of us getting so much from the sea in terms of recreation, transportation, trade, energy, protein, security, or just that sense of awe and wonder we feel being part of something larger than ourselves, it's time to give something back to our sacred blue marble planet. As for mermaids, I believe in them. To me, Margo, Roz, long-time ocean explorer and conservationist Sylvia Earle ("her deepness"), and many other ocean-loving and activist women I've known are the real-life mermaids who inspire me and give me hope.

David Helvarg is an author and founder of the Blue Frontier Campaign (www.bluefront.org), a citizen activist group that works to promote unity around marine issues. His books include Blue Frontier, 50 Ways to Save the Ocean, Rescue Warriors, and his newest, The Golden Shore – California's Love Affair with the Sea.



Mermaid Kylee has performed full-time as one of the world-famous Weeki Wachee mermaids for the past five years. She holds the titles of "Mrs. Weeki Wachee" and "International Mermaid," and models for the Mermaids R Us tail company—plus finds time to teach students at her own dance studio, A K Dance Away, in Spring Hill, Florida. Kylee's numerous years of dance training have been a huge aid in her mermaid career performances, showcasing her underwater ballet and grace.

HALF-LAND HALF-SEA BEAUTY

Layne Maheu

i like mermaids like I like walking along the beach or looking out over the ocean on a weathery day. It's strange to look out over the sea, and know that, under its waves, it is completely uninhabitable to you. Left on your own, you would die out there, in the cold sea currents and the briney green bubbles, within a matter of minutes.

And so, I like the notion of a half-human, half-sea creature, living down under the waves, especially one with obvious overtones of sex and tragedy.

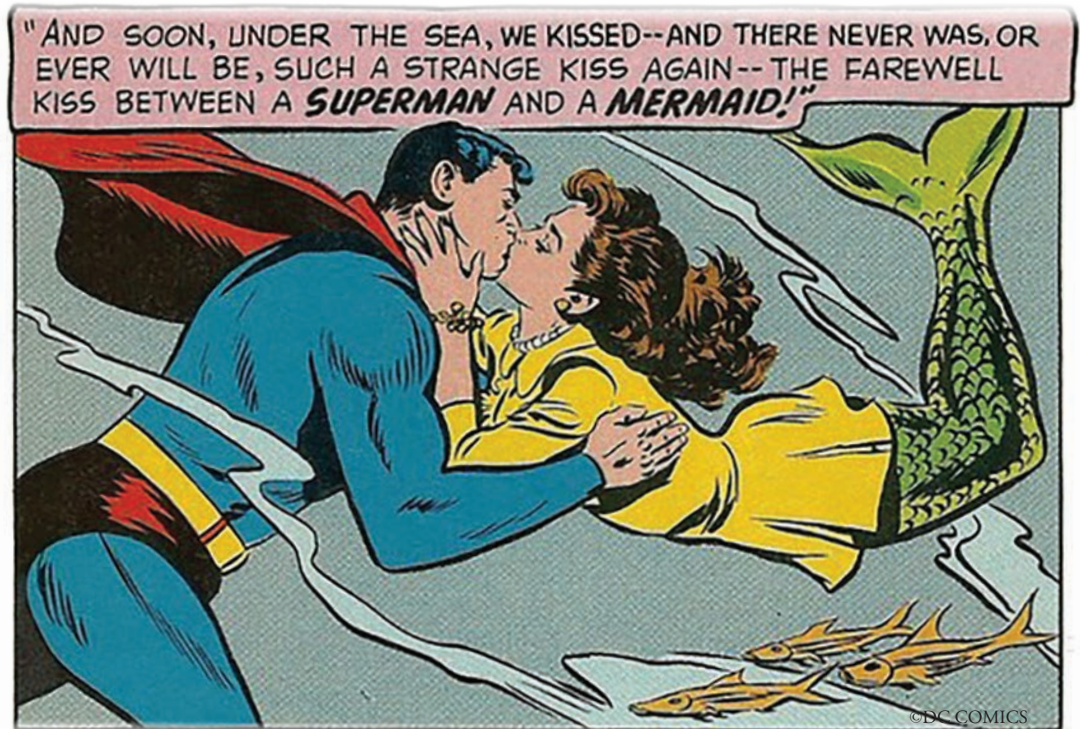
Life from the sea is so different from us. It's strange to think that a certain type of vegetarian won't eat a rabbit or a chicken or a goose, but will eat a fish. Perhaps because the land creature has things like eyes and feelings and babies and a heart. And land animals have these things in ways we can recognize. But life in the sea is so alien to us. It's harder to empathize with a fish. Even though I've read that fish have feelings and a complicated social life and a good memory, still, these qualities just don't translate. So, if you put a sea creature on the plate of a certain type of vegetarian, the pescatarian will eat the fish/crustacean/mollusk without compunction.

We just don't get it—the life of a fish.

There's something too different about them—such complete otherness—they're cold, they're scaly, they're slimy, they're wet. They're smelly. In a way they seem more foreign to us than plants. Yet, every human, every mammal, begins its life in the saltwater of its momma's belly. We start out just like a fish. So I think there is a yearning in us, a psychic desire in the DNA of our imaginations, to envision the Mermaid: the half-land, half-sea beauty.

She swims up and sings to us between these two worlds, where our desire can go no further upon the shore.

Layne Maheu is the author of Song of the Crow. Learn more at Songofthecrow.com.



SUPERMAN'S LOVE TAIL

David Bar Katz

The love of Superman's life was a cripple. Or so I thought. It was the mid-70s when I got my hands on the 1959 comic in which Lori Lemaris first appeared. I was shocked. Superman was in love with someone confined to a wheelchair! With a blanket over her lap like an infirm grandmother. The implication of course was that the legs beneath her were atrophied. Superman could have anyone he wanted! The hottest girls at his high school, movie stars, inter-planetary empresses, but instead he'd fallen for a paraplegic girl. I felt the gears grinding in my pre-pubescent brain, reorganizing what I should consider attractive. If withered legs were sexy to Superman then who was I not to think they were hot?

But just as I had reoriented to my new ideal of beauty there was another revelation; her legs weren't just non-working, they had scales!! Wait, those aren't legs, those are fins! Holy shit, she has a tail!! Superman is in love with a fish!!

Now whatever happens to males between childhood and adulthood that makes the idea of mermaids sexy had not happened to me yet. Fish were slimy, they were cold. Who would rather touch rough scales over warm flesh? I spoke to my friends about this development in Superman's love life and we were all universally appalled. Many decided to take this opportunity to switch their allegiance to Batman. There was no way Bruce Wayne was going to bang a fish! It's what everyone had always suspected; Superman was a geek. He wants to be with the outcasts. He wants to sit at the loser table at lunch. Clark Kent is the one that's real, *Superman is the fiction*.

But I wasn't going to abandon my hero so casually. I had seen another side of him and I liked it. For the first time I saw Superman truly in love. And it wasn't a teenage crush. It was eternal love.

I will never forget the image of Clark Kent in a later comic standing on a cliff, buffeted by rain and wind and sea, looking helpless, not physically helpless, that never happened. He was emotionally helpless.

He was revealed. And he said, "Lori, you can read minds. If you're really out there, I implore you. Come ... to ... me!"

I tried to make my case for Superman to my friend Ike. But he felt betrayed. You see, later, Superman told Lori that he would quit the surface world to have her. Superman gained Lori's love but lost Ike's and thousands of other kids' forever. And like a jilted lover, Ike got mean.

"She's a fish!! The two of them can never be together!"

I protested. "But she's kind of lovely when she swims. And they can do it together at pressures no normal human could ...?" But Ike cut me off.

"Mermaids don't have vaginas!"

I was nine and I couldn't really speak to that. If Lori did have a vagina, I didn't know where it was. But at that point in my life I had no idea where they were on non-mermaid women.

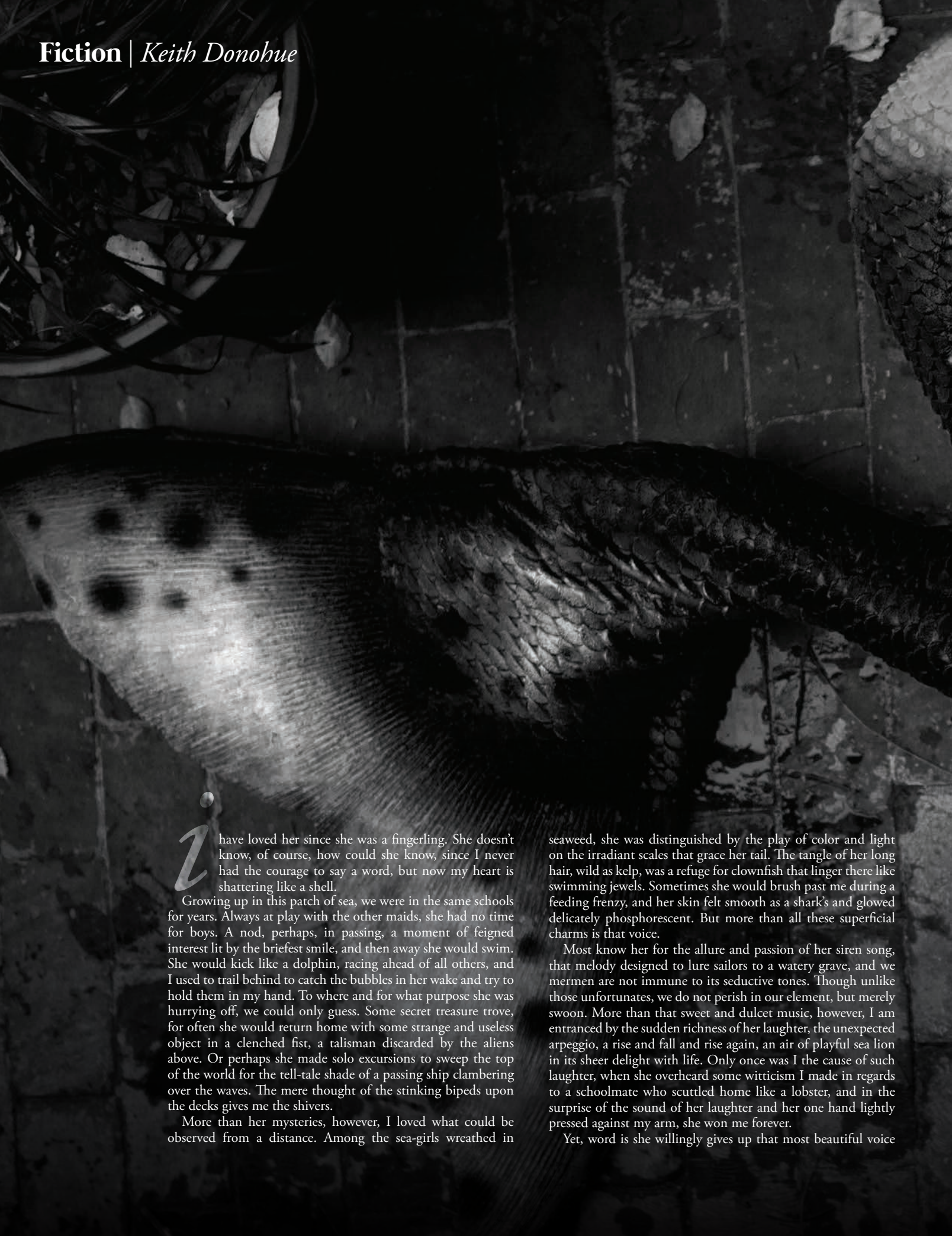
"He's happy with her," I said. Ike looked furious. I noticed he was holding an X-Man comic. I'd lost him forever.

Ike said, "They can never have sex. She can't fight for him, like Wonder Woman. It's like he loves someone with a disease. And anyway, he can never take her off of Earth where all the good adventures are because there are no oceans in space and that's where he's from!"

When I think back to how I responded to Ike I remember why I first fell in love with Superman. It wasn't because he could hit harder than anybody or because he was the strongest person ever. It was because he would do anything to save someone he loved.

I said to Ike, "He *can* take her into space. And then he can cry. Super-tears that don't freeze and are salty like the ocean. He will make a sea of tears in the middle of space just for her where they can live forever."

David Bar Katz is a playwright and screenwriter who thinks that life is like being with a mermaid: when you feel like fish she's a woman, when you need a woman you get a fish.



I have loved her since she was a fingerling. She doesn't know, of course, how could she know, since I never had the courage to say a word, but now my heart is shattering like a shell.

Growing up in this patch of sea, we were in the same schools for years. Always at play with the other maids, she had no time for boys. A nod, perhaps, in passing, a moment of feigned interest lit by the briefest smile, and then away she would swim. She would kick like a dolphin, racing ahead of all others, and I used to trail behind to catch the bubbles in her wake and try to hold them in my hand. To where and for what purpose she was hurrying off, we could only guess. Some secret treasure trove, for often she would return home with some strange and useless object in a clenched fist, a talisman discarded by the aliens above. Or perhaps she made solo excursions to sweep the top of the world for the tell-tale shade of a passing ship clambering over the waves. The mere thought of the stinking bipeds upon the decks gives me the shivers.

More than her mysteries, however, I loved what could be observed from a distance. Among the sea-girls wreathed in

seaweed, she was distinguished by the play of color and light on the irradiant scales that grace her tail. The tangle of her long hair, wild as kelp, was a refuge for clownfish that linger there like swimming jewels. Sometimes she would brush past me during a feeding frenzy, and her skin felt smooth as a shark's and glowed delicately phosphorescent. But more than all these superficial charms is that voice.

Most know her for the allure and passion of her siren song, that melody designed to lure sailors to a watery grave, and we mermaids are not immune to its seductive tones. Though unlike those unfortunates, we do not perish in our element, but merely swoon. More than that sweet and dulcet music, however, I am entranced by the sudden richness of her laughter, the unexpected arpeggio, a rise and fall and rise again, an air of playful sea lion in its sheer delight with life. Only once was I the cause of such laughter, when she overheard some witticism I made in regards to a schoolmate who scuttled home like a lobster, and in the surprise of the sound of her laughter and her one hand lightly pressed against my arm, she won me forever.

Yet, word is she willingly gives up that most beautiful voice



Henry Drewal talks about

MAMI WATA

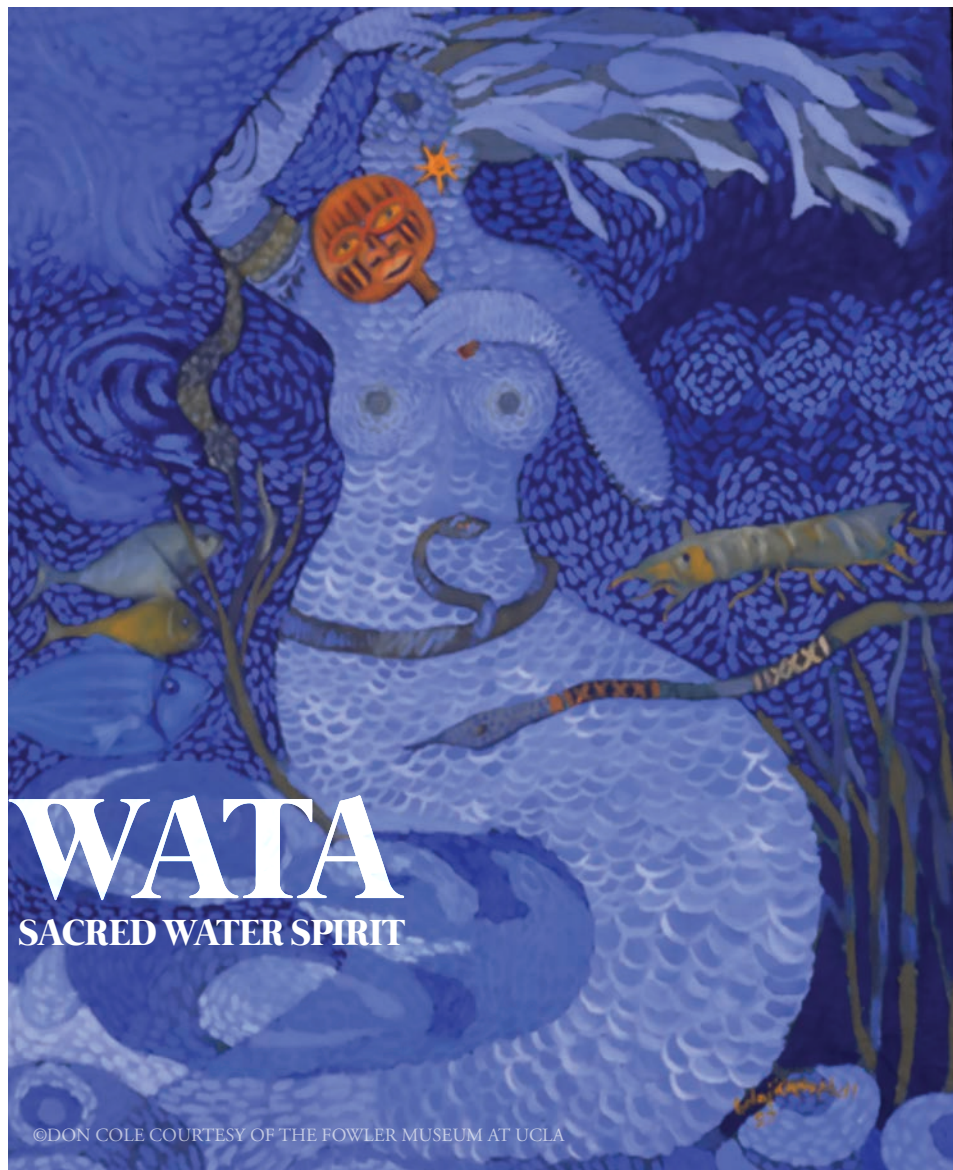
SACRED WATER SPIRIT

©DON COLE COURTESY OF THE FOWLER MUSEUM AT UCLA

henry John Drewal, Evjue-Bascom Professor of Art History and Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is not only a Mami Wata scholar, but a believer. As he puts it, “she seduced me.” Over the past few decades, he’s travelled all over Africa and met countless Mami Wata priests and priestesses, artists, and followers.

Drewal is a leading expert on the water spirit Mami Wata, or Mother Water, who is celebrated throughout much of Africa and the African-Atlantic world. A rich assortment of art surrounds Mami Wata, and she’s often portrayed as a mermaid, with the head and torso of a woman and the tail of a fish. She can also take the form of a snake charmer, either in combination with her mermaid attributes or separate from them.

Carolyn Turgeon spoke to Drewal about Mami Wata, and mermaids throughout the world.



So when did Mami Wata start appearing as a mermaid in spiritual art?

The mermaid image that became the primary icon for Mami Wata in Africa I believe came with the arrival of Europeans on the west coast of Africa in the 1490s. An African sculptor copied one of these European mermaid images and showed the mermaid swimming with crocodiles, the key symbols of water spirits where the sculptor lived. I believe this is how the mermaid was first incorporated into an African pantheon of water spirits, and that the image spread from that moment on. But long before that moment, Africans used a variety of hybrid human-animal images to represent ancient, indigenous water deities.

In the late nineteenth century comes another European image: a chromolithograph from Hamburg, Germany, that’s actually a poster for a popular traveling show and depicts an exotic woman handling snakes. My belief is that this snake charmer image was seen by African sailors and carried to West Africa and that it eventually joined the mermaid as one of the other key images for Mami Wata.

Are there mermen, too?

Yes. Mostly the water spirits are female, but there are also male spirits. There’s a whole pantheon of what we call Mami Watas, or mothers of water, and then there are also Papi Watas. Some of these male water spirits are inspired by Indian prints of Hindu gods and goddesses with multiple heads and multiple arms, but those are interpreted by Africans as specific male water spirits.

Do you ever have people dressing as mermaids, or Mami Wata, in this tradition?

Yes. When the priests and priestesses for Mami Wata and other water spirits are leading ceremonies, they’ll sometimes dress as the goddess and will handle a cloth snake around their shoulders or dress in a particular way that suggests their transformation into the spirit.

Were you ever in a ceremony where a Mami Wata priestess was wearing a mermaid tail?

I've never seen mermaid tails worn during ceremonies, but the priestesses do sometimes handle snakes. Images of the snake charmer only show her from the waist up as she handles two snakes. As many priests and priestesses explained to me, we only see the upper part of Mami Wata because she's hiding her secret, which is the fish tail.

What are the ceremonies for?

They are to bring the spirit of Mami Wata to the ceremony, often to give guidance to those gathered there. Sometimes people come with specific problems or issues and the priest or the priestess then transmits messages from the deity. Many of the priests and priestesses are also medicine men and/or women whose purpose is to heal and to protect and to bring good fortune to their followers.

Are you yourself interested in American mermaids, like those you'll find at the Coney Island Mermaid Parade or Weeki Wachee Springs?

I'm fascinated by all the places where mermaids are celebrated outside of Africa and the African diaspora. I think the mermaid is a universal phenomenon. In fact I've been talking to a European colleague who is a curator in a museum and we're hoping to do an exhibition on global mermaids. The four regions that we've identified so far are Southeast Asia (or the Pacific); the Americas, because in North, Central, and South America there are all these traditions about mermaids and water spirits; Africa; and then the Arctic Circle, Alaska included, because there's a great prevalence of images of mermaids among Inuit peoples.

So you would see a place like Weeki Wachee Springs as a manifestation of Mami Wata? Even if no one there has ever heard of her?

Absolutely.

Would a believer in Mami Wata interpret any mermaid as a manifestation of her?

Yes. Here's an example. Back in the '80s, the film *Splash* was shown in some African cinemas and, after, artists started depicting Daryl Hannah as a mermaid, and that spawned a whole other series of art in honor of Mami Wata because Africans saw that film and they said, "Oh, those Americans! They've also got Mami Wata!" Those things have had an impact globally now, because of world media and so on. So Africans viewing *Splash* very clearly saw a representation of Mami Wata.

How would you explain to someone at Weeki Wachee this deeper thing that's happening, that goes beyond a woman wearing a tail and swimming around for an audience?

It has turned into entertainment in the context of Weeki Wachee, but I would want people to understand that the notion of mermaids, or spirits associated with the water, is a serious religious belief in many parts of the world. It partakes of that larger story. It's not only about entertainment or playfulness or fable, but it's touching on certain beliefs and practices that people have and that we need to recognize and respect.

So when you see an American mermaid, you see her as representing something more spiritual?

Yes. In the African diaspora many of the African water divinities are water goddesses and are represented as mermaids, part human and part aquatic. That's coming directly out of African beliefs about what these water spirits might look like if we could see them. They'd be this creature of transformation, occupying two spaces: the human realm of culture as well as nature, and the land as well as the sea. I think we're actually getting back in touch with the notion of first forms of life originating in the sea and then coming to land. Maybe some of us are still stuck in that in-between state!

Do you feel like our fascination with mermaids speaks of a larger spiritual longing?

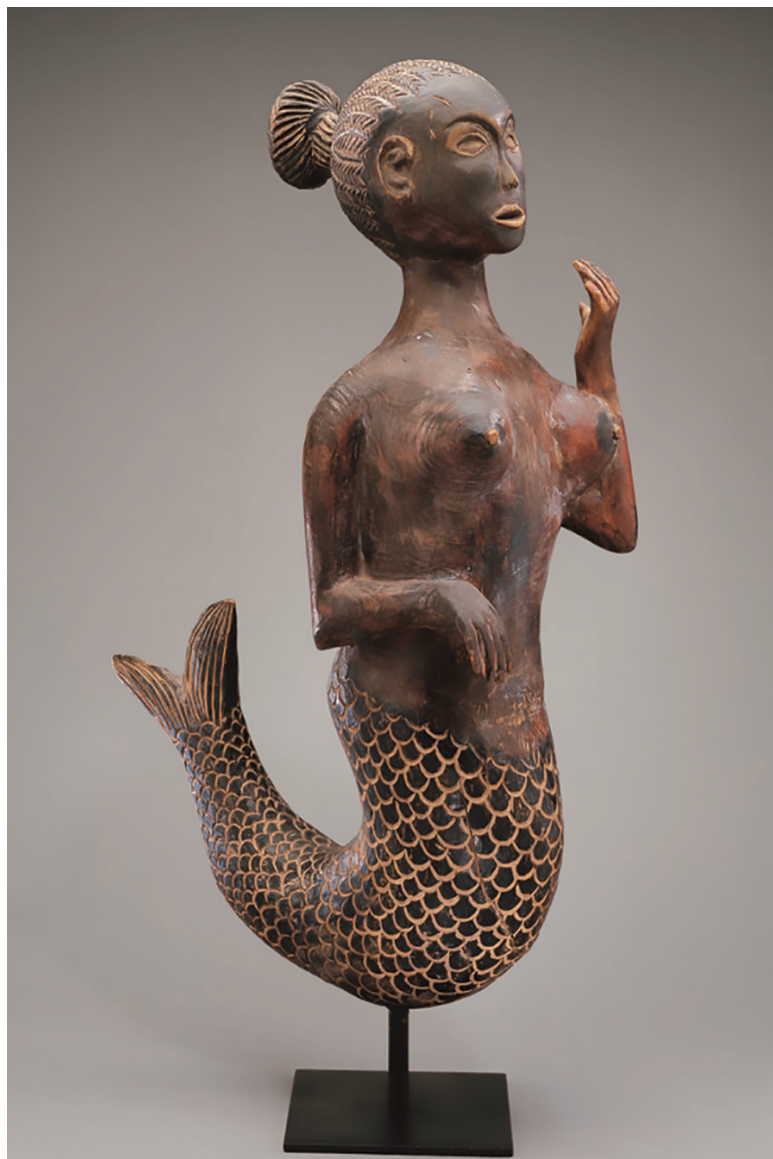
Yes, I think it does. I think it's part of our need to find answers to what this world is about, how it was created, what the creatures that occupy it are, and what happens to us when we leave this world and go elsewhere. It's about the spiritual aspects of the cosmos, and certainly I think mermaids are a part of that.

INTERVIEWED BY CAROLYN TURGEON



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“I think the mermaid is a universal phenomenon.”



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1 THE FOWLER MUSEUM at UCLA is now celebrating its 50th anniversary. It explores global arts and cultures with an emphasis on works from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas—past and present. The Fowler provides exciting, informative, and thought-provoking exhibitions and events for the UCLA community and the people of greater Los Angeles and beyond. Admission is free! Fowler.ucla.edu.

2 A WORLD OF SELKIES Morgan Grey explores selkie myths from around the world on her informative yet scintillating blog at Morgangrey.com.

3 MERMAID FACTORY You can order a charming pre-painted mermaid from the company's Virginia shop, or tap into your creativity and design one of your very own, selecting from countless dazzling options. Or get an "on the go" mermaid kit and bring your creation to life in your own home. The Mermaid Factory is based in Norfolk, where mermaids adorn street corners and enchant many a passerby. Mermaidfactory.com.

4 APPLEJACK APPAREL If your little girl dreams of mermaids, surprise and delight her with a sparkling tail of her very own. Mesmerizing and mer-morable, Applejack Apparel costumes last through hours and hours of bathtub mermaid play and always look amazing in photos. Made of high-quality spandex, they're super comfortable yet look like they were pulled straight from the sea. Available in infant sizes to 14 girls. Applejackapparel.com.

5 AQUATAILS handcrafts swimmable mermaid tails right here in the USA—offering the most variety of styles, fabrics, and colors! AquaTails is careful to sell only the highest quality products: not only tails so lovely they've been called works of art, but toys and accessories for mermaids and mermen of all ages, including a new Make-a-Mermaid Doll line and a Pool Pals line. AquaTails donates a portion of its profits to ocean charities and to Covenant House, helping homeless kids around the world. Aquatails.com.

MY TIDEPPOOL

My tidepool, beloved, where we meet
after rains and moon conspire,
after the salt washes in on a wave,
weaving itself into every grain of sand.
And beloved, the pool, tidal flow,
your hair spread about like scallop shells,
silver in your eyes, refractions of moonlight,
your lips opening and closing as anemones do.
Eyes like pools, my darling, and the tide of love
pouring over us, under us, all around
till we are soaked through and who can tell
if we are wet from waves or tears or love.
My tidepool, beloved, love in tides pooling,
about us, eels and fish schooling,
and what we learn,
what we discern,
what we earn
is love.

Jane Yolen has been called the "American Hans Christian Andersen" by Newsweek and a "modern day Aesop" by The New York Times. She's written over 300 books. Learn more at janeyolen.com.

SIREN: DIVA of the RHINE

She sits on a rock and sings.
All about her the world is still.
She does not expect diamond rings.
The water makes her long hair curl.

The water makes her long hair curl.
All she expects is absolute devotion
From the sailors, the landsman, the fish,
Leviathan who hears her deep in his ocean.

Leviathan who hears her deep in his ocean
Does not know that her white dress clings,
Still he worships—as only fish can—
The enchanting woman who sings and sings.

The enchanting woman who sings and sings,
With the water making her hair curl,
And Leviathan so deep in his ocean,
Both bring magic into our mundane world.

Julie Atlas Muz is one of the most acclaimed and prolific conceptual performers, burlesque stars, and choreographers—not to mention mermaids—in New York. "My first underwater mermaid experience was at the Coral Room," she says, referring to the now-defunct club that opened in 2003 and featured a 9,000-gallon saltwater aquarium with live fish and mermaid shows, "but I've always been a mermaid, ever since I was a little tadpole." Julie continues to perform as a mermaid in preparation for her grand tour of the world's aquariums. Learn more at julieatlasmuz.com.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS THAT LIVE
LIKE FISH!

MERMAIDS

Vintage Roadside presents
**THE STORY OF
AQUARAMA**

In 1963, if you were headed out on a summer vacation and wanted to take in a live mermaid show while you were at it, your choices were somewhat limited. You could head for Texas and enjoy a show at Aquarena Springs (complete with diving pig), or perhaps you'd motor down to Florida and visit the queen of the mermaid shows—that at Weeki Wachee Springs. But in 1964 a new chapter of mermaid history was written with the grand opening of the Aquarama.

So pack up the car and get out the Missouri road map—we're headed for Osage Beach and the shores of the Lake of the Ozarks.

While at first thought the idea of a mermaid attraction in Missouri may seem strange, the Lake of the Ozarks area had many similarities to other major summer season destinations of the 1960s. The lake area offered excursion boats, miniature golf courses, amusement parks, hay rides, and in 1964, being the largest man-made lake in the United States, several water ski shows. With many people coming to the area to enjoy the water the idea of a mermaid attraction seemed perfect.

The man behind the Aquarama was Wally Johl, who, along with his wife Nola and son Marc, had settled at the lake in late 1959. The Johl family spent their first years at the lake building swimming pools for many of the area motels and resorts, running boat rentals, and operating a trampoline attraction called Trampoline Town. It was during a 1962 visit to none other than Weeki Wachee that the Johl family decided to turn their dream of an underwater attraction into a reality. In the winter of 1963 construction of the Aquarama began.

Upon completion of the theater-style auditorium, the audience

would have a panoramic view of the 85,000-gallon tank through 12 large plate-glass windows. Behind the glass, giant clam shells waited to reveal beautiful mermaids while a curtain of bubbles provided a unique show of its own.

Although the construction of the auditorium had its own set of challenges, one of the biggest keys to the success of the Aquarama was still needed—live mermaids. Auditioning, hiring, and training mermaids was something that had never been done at the Lake of the Ozarks, but the Johl family had planned well in advance. During their 1962 visit to Florida, the Johls had met Barbara, a Weeki Wachee performer with years of underwater experience who had agreed to come to Missouri to train the original Aquarama Aquamaids. After spending 1963 performing with the *Aqua Spectacular*, a traveling aquatic show based in Miami, Barbara loaded up her Ford Falcon and headed for Osage Beach.

The original 1964 cast was made up of eight Aquamaids and two Aqualads. While Weeki Wachee had their choice of experienced performers, the Aquarama performers, with the exception of Barbara, were just 15 and 16 years old and attended the local high school. Barbara taught the cast underwater ballet along with basic maneuvers and components of routines she had learned at Weeki Wachee. Another challenge the performers faced the first season was that the heated Aquarama tank would not be completed in time for the performers to train in. The Aquamaids and Aqualads found themselves in February of 1964 learning to breathe with continually flowing air hoses in the unheated



IMAGE COURTESY OF VINTAGE ROADSIDE

outdoor pool of a local motel with snow still on the ground. To this day many of the former performers still remember just how cold that pool was.

With the cast trained and the opening date set for May 30th, 1964, the cast still needed costumes and, most importantly, mermaid tails. For some of the non-mermaid routines the Aquarama performers wore Jantzen swimsuits that were embellished by hand with thousands of sequins and stones that would show up well under water. Several other routines such as “The Bullfight in Spain” and the Hawaiian routine called for costumes that would be designed and created especially for the Aquarama. The task of designing and creating these costumes fell on Nola, Marc, and local seamstress extraordinaire Alma Bates.

Procuring mermaid tails in 1964 was much different than today where an internet search for “mermaid tails for sale” returns countless options. The lack of ready-to-wear mermaid tails at that time meant that the Aquarama tails would need to be hand-created. The Johls chose shimmering gold and silver lamé for their tails and then uniquely decorated each one with cut glass stones and colored sequins. Each tail was lined with a plain fabric and also included a matching top. (Note: There are four surviving original Aquarama mermaid tails.)

One of the main differences between the Aquarama tails and contemporary mermaid tails is the fabric used in their construction. Although invented in 1959, spandex had yet to become widely used for garments, and latex was still being used mainly for swim caps. The lack of these stretchable materials meant the Aquarama tails needed to be sized perfectly to fit each mermaid. This fit was accomplished

by a combination of careful measurements along with a zipper that ran the entire length of the tails. One former Aquarama mermaid recalls coating the zipper of her tail with Vaseline to make it easier to use during underwater costume changes.

Auditorium complete, gift shop stocked, costumes created, and performers trained, the Aquarama opened to the public on Memorial Day, 1964. Offering two shows daily at 2:30 PM and 8:30 PM, the Aquarama presented patrons with an Around the World Underwater theme that first season. A few of the settings for the acts included: Hawaii, Tasmania, Paris, Rome, and a USA number performed to a John Philip Sousa march. The performances included prerecorded music with live narration by Mrs. Johl while the operation of the house and underwater lighting was handled by Mr. Johl.

Between the years 1965 and 1967, the Aquarama expanded on both their routines and costumes. Some of the more unique routines included a James-Bond-inspired *Thunderball* sketch that featured a battle to the death between a “good” Aqualad and an “evil” Aqualad, a go-go routine with performers in underwater cages shaking and shimmying away to Sandy Nelson’s “Let There Be Drums,” and an Alley Cat routine that had the girls wearing black and white one-piece suits (complete with tail) accessorized with black tights and black gloves. The mermaid routines remained a staple of the Aquarama with many of the former Aquamaids recalling these performances as their favorite acts. The Aquamaids who happened to be blondes also recall another point of pride—their hair tinted green each summer from the chlorine used in Aquarama’s tank.



The year 1968 saw major changes at the Aquarama. It became known as the Cabaret Aquarama, and the auditorium-style seating was replaced by tables, chairs, and a dance floor. The Aquarama also brought in a chef and full wait staff to complete the transition to a supper club, with two underwater shows nightly at 7:00 and 9:30 PM. Along with dinner, patrons could also enjoy a new signature cocktail—the Aquarama Sling served by Aquarama’s master mixologist.

It would also be the final year of the Johls’ involvement with the Aquarama. In five years they had realized a dream and entertained countless visitors to the Lake of the Ozarks. Over those five years a total of 28 performers called the 85,000-gallon tank their summer home. Several of the former cast members recall their stints at the Aquarama as being some of the happiest times of their lives. Many still remain close friends after hanging up their mermaid tails more than 40 years ago. In the words of one former Aquamaid, “Nothing compares to being a mermaid. It’s the best job in the world!”

The Aquarama continued under different management from 1969 to 1973 before meeting the fate of countless other mom and pop roadside attractions. The Aquamaids and Aqualads went on with their lives and the story of the Aquarama slowly faded away as the years went by.

We first became aware of the Aquarama seven years ago when we were looking for new designs to add to our line of t-shirts that display original graphics from bygone businesses of the 1950s to 1970s. We were at an antique show in Portland, Oregon, and found a 1964 Aquarama brochure. We fell in love with the fact that there was once a mermaid show in Missouri as well as the graphic they used in their advertising. As we began to research the story behind the Aquarama before producing our Aquarama t-shirt, we had no idea how much history was waiting out there for us to discover. We’ve been fortunate enough to speak with almost the entire original cast and, through the generosity of several former performers as well as the Johl family, we’ve been able to share original cast photos, vintage home movies of the Aquarama, audio clips used during the actual performances, and several of the original costumes including mermaid tails. We’ve developed a 90-minute multimedia presentation on the history of Aquarama and have been lucky enough to include none other than Marina the Fire-Eating Mermaid (aka MeduSirena) as our special guest at our recent presentations. Marina shares our love and appreciation for the history behind vintage aquatic shows and is the perfect “now” for our Then and Now Q&A sessions.

Our journey researching and documenting mermaid history continues. If you have any stories of past mermaid attractions or performers we’d love to hear from you!



Vintage Roadside is the husband and wife team of Jeff Kunkle and Kelly Burg. You can learn more about their adventures in history at vintageroadside.com.

WHEN CORAL DREAMS

Tera Lynn Childs

Known as the “Real-Life Ariel,” Traci Hines is a bubbly singer/songwriter known for her YouTube videos—her version of The Little Mermaid’s “Part of Your World” has nearly 2 million views—and original music. She’s also a model, voiceover artist, actress, and designer of mermaid-inspired merchandise—plus she portrays everyone’s favorite mermaid at live events all over southern California. “I not only see myself in Ariel,” she says, “but who I want to be. Ariel has big, almost impossible dreams, and doesn’t let anyone stop her in going after them.” Learn more at TraciHines.com.

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COSTUMING by JOELLEN ELAM

“Tonight is the night,” Coral Ballenato promised herself as she studied her reflection in the mirror.

Her black curls rippled around her face in the gentle current that drifted through the window of her best friend’s bathroom. The squid ink liner that made her dark brown eyes look even bigger than usual and the peachy stain she’d applied to her lips and cheeks—almost the same shade as her tailfin—made her feel prettier. Older. More confident.

And if she was finally going to make the first move with Zak Marlin, she needed to feel more confident. Way, way, way more confident.

“For the love of cod,” Zanzia complained from beyond the bathroom door, “what is taking you so long?”

“Almost done,” Coral called out.

One last check to make sure she hadn’t overdone the makeup. It was one thing to give herself a little confidence-boosting makeover. It was another to make it so obvious that Zanzia noticed. The last thing Coral wanted was her best friend knowing how she felt about Zak.

Coral was just swiping off the excess color from her lips when she heard the front door open.

“I’m home,” Zak called out, his voice resonating through the house.

She couldn’t help the smile.

“Too bad,” Zanzia shouted back, pretending to be annoyed when Coral knew good and well that she adored her big brother.

The first time Coral met Zak was when Zanzia invited her over to work on their Thalassinian Royal Family project in Year Seven history. Two years older than his sister, Zak was cute and charming and Coral fell for him instantly.

After three years she still hadn’t managed to say anything more impressive than hello. But that was all going to change tonight. She was 16 now—well, she would be on her birthday next month—and she was ready to take her crush to the next level. She’d been sitting at zero for so long that even an actual sentence would be a step up, but she was going all out. Before the night was over she would ask Zak out.

And hopefully she wouldn’t faint when she did.

“Coral!” Zanzia jiggled the door handle. “Come on, I’m starving. Mom made calamari loaf.”

“I’m coming,” Coral said, yanking the door open.

“Finally,” Zanzia grabbed her by the wrist before Coral could swim through. “Let’s go.”

For a mergirl about as big around as an electric eel, Zanzia had a never-ending appetite. Coral came over for family dinner every Friday night and had seen her best friend put away an alarming amount of food. With her nerves always making her stomach swim circles, Coral could barely manage to eat half as much.

Zanzia dragged Coral downstairs to the kitchen so they could help set the table. Like she did every week, Coral started to set out five place settings.

“Here,” Zanzia said, adding an extra set of dishes and seasticks to the stack.

Coral frowned. “I already have five.”

“I know,” Zanzia said with a wave. “Zak is bringing a friend over.”

Coral shrugged. She was just setting down the sixth

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PEARLS

THE TEARS OF MERMAIDS

Stephen G. Bloom

Six years ago, while feeding my addiction to vampy Marlene Dietrich movies and Häagen-Dazs ice cream, I found myself one Saturday night watching an otherwise forgettable film called *Desire*. In the film's first 15 minutes, jonesing to steal a breathtaking strand of pearls from a Champs Élysées jewelry store, jewel-thief Dietrich sniffs at the strand's astronomical price. Outraged, the jeweler proclaims to Dietrich, "But madam, these pearls are tears of mermaids!"

That pearls could be actual tears of mermaids was a heady concept that instantly grabbed me. What a way to describe pearls! From that moment on, I was hooked on the idea. Pearls didn't come from oysters, they came from mermaids. At least metaphorically they did.

In a way, it made sense. Both pearls and mermaids are beguiling, mysterious, and erotic. Both are the stuff of legend. Both come from the depths of the faraway sea.

I've carried a torch for pearls (and mermaids) forever. As a teenager, my favorite book was *The Pearl*, which I probably read 20 times. I had (and still have) a wild crush on Holly Golightly, the Audrey Hepburn character in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, bedecked in those exquisite pearl strands while peering into Tiffany's window on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. Princess Grace, Jackie Kennedy, and Princess Diana were beautiful women, yes, but what sealed their sophistication and charm for me wasn't their looks, it was the pearls they wore.

Not everyone "gets" pearls. Few men do because pearls are so fundamentally distinct when it comes to quantifying, grading, and pricing, in the way diamonds and gold are. Men seem to prefer a fail-safe system that matches specific characteristics with corresponding prices. Pearls don't have carats or the 4C's to set a standard price. Setting a price of a pearl is entirely subjective.

Maybe that's one of the reasons I like them so much. Their beauty lies wholly with the beholder. While a dealer can boast of a pearl's color, luster, skin purity, orient, shape, there's no universal grading system for pearls. The same strand can go for \$300 or \$30,000. Some circumspect buyers might seek an official appraisal of a pearl necklace, but even the best appraisals are sketchy.

Still, flawless pearls can, and ought to, take your breath away. I've seen hundreds of thousands of pearls by now, and every time I see another, I'm still speechless. I'm dumb drunk when I look at beautiful pearls. What's even better is to hold a bunched-up strand in the palm of your hand. There's something about the weight, density, color, and shine. It's a feeling like nothing else in the world.

Some people have visions of Jesus, diamonds, Rolexes, Rolls Royces, the 18th hole at St. Andrews. My visions have always been of pearls. Big, beautiful, shiny, luminescent ones. The best have orient, a depth that allows a connoisseur to look into the pearl and see the different layers of conchiolin, or calcium carbonate. It's like looking into a pearl's soul.

On my living room couch that Saturday night, upon hearing that magical expression, tears of mermaids, I decided to do something about it. I'd track the zigzag path pearls take, merrily plinking their way along an international route of tens of thousands of miles—from the moment an elegant woman in New York (Hong Kong, Geneva, or Paris, etc.) wraps a dazzling strand of glistening pearls around her neck, back to the instant a diver off the coast of Australia (China, Mexico, Tahiti, or the Philippines) scoops up from the ocean floor a live oyster, to be implanted with a bead that will form the core of a pearl. My goal was to follow each step of the itinerary, from diver's hand to woman's bosom—and everywhere and everyone in between.

And who knew? Maybe I'd see if pearls were the actual tears of mermaids.

It was a trip that took four years and 30,000 miles. I met pearl patriarchs and pearl paupers. I hiked through Japan (Osaka, Toba, Kobe), Hong Kong, China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Zhejiang, Hainan, Zhuji, Xuwen), and the Philippines (Manila and Palawan). I traveled to French Polynesia (Tahiti, Aratua, Apataki, Nuutina, Nengo Nengo, Marutea Sud, Mangareva, Aukenea, and Anuraro). I flew to Sydney and Melbourne, backpacked in the rural Outback and Northern Territory, traveling to Darwin, Broome, Kuri Bay, Beagle Bay, Cygnet Bay, and Eighty Mile Beach on Australia's isolated Top End. I turned into a Marco Polo of sorts, searching for the world's most spectacular pearls and the mermaids who made them possible. As with the thirteenth-century Venetian traveler, no one had ever traveled to so many distant pearl outposts and was allowed to see what I saw. Along the way, I wangled my way into pearl farms and production sites seldom visited by westerners, never by those outside the tight circle of pearl traders. I went behind curtains at frenzied pearl auctions in Hong Kong, where dealers snapped up millions of dollars in pearl lots, only to flip them minutes later for millions more. I shadowed fast-talking Cuban-cigar-smoking brokers as they toted leather valises stuffed with pearls and wads of cash.

Through some manic perseverance (and changeable airline tickets), I insinuated myself into the lives of the world's four most powerful pearl lords. Each seemed spun out of a James Bond novel. Each was more outrageous than the next, and each loved dishing on the other. I stayed with two pearl lords on private islands. One was a Hugh Hefner wannabe (though he didn't wear pajamas during the day). Another was one of Australia's wealthiest men, still striving for recognition independent of his father who started the family business a half-century earlier. A third mogul was an upstart, Italian-born Aussie whose charm and chutzpah had helped create an emerging worldwide network, as well as an outrageous mansion hanging on a cliff overlooking Sydney's Tamarama Beach. The fourth was a 73-year-old rags-to-riches Buddha-like philosopher, with an eight-year-old and a 52-year-old son, and a mermaid of a mistress in between. Three of the four pearl magnates own planes or helicopters; one owns a fleet of dozens of aircraft and an armada of more than 140 sea vessels (second only to his nation's Navy).

I hired myself out as a pearl deckhand, doing backbreaking work, rising with the ship's crew at 5 AM and going to bed exhausted at 8 PM. I sorted pearls on a rigger as humpback whales breached off the ship's starboard side. I found the exact spot off the coast of Venezuela where Columbus on his third voyage to the New World took sight of 12 Indians wearing pearls the size of walnuts. I sailed in outlets off the coast of Northern Australia so secluded they're





not yet charted on the government's own topographical maps.

For two years I pestered wary pearl executives at the international auction house of Christie's, which culminated one day in my dropping everything and flying to New York to witness the sale of an eye-popping double strand of spectacular natural pearls that fetched \$7.1 million, a world record.

I knew there'd be scores of supporting characters in this worldwide detective story—those who create, find, nurture, harvest, clean, treat, fashion, sort, grade, craft, design, sell, re-sell, polish, string, and finally deliver the pearls to the happy customer. I met several pearl fishermen who, like Kino in John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, learned gut-wrenching lessons about greed and avarice after they found priceless pearls. Through it all, I celebrated the contributions of the laborers whose work was essential in producing the single most expensive product that comes from the world's oceans.

For me, what started as a novel way to tell a story, as well as an innocent fascination with the world's oldest gem, turned into a pilgrimage and ended as an obsession. I left my family, my wife and teenage son, for months on end. I flew in too many Tinkertoy single-engine planes that took off and landed on bumpy dirt roads that doubled as runways. I met pearlery who had been Communist rebel guerrillas. I narrowly escaped deportation from the Philippines as I tracked the exquisite gold-lipped *Pinctada maxima* oyster. I bunked in strangers' dank basements, slept in

dumps, as well as in airline middle-aisle seats with thunderous snorers, and in impossibly narrow ship berths that heaved back and forth at night.

Whenever I sleepwalked into yet another hotel, hostel, or hovel on my four-continent odyssey, these items were on my mental list of requirements: a lock on the door; no cockroaches or rats; and please, no urine or feces smell. I was successful only part of the time. In several destinations, I shared rooms with animals (medium-sized if I was lucky, small if I was not). I scrapped brine, algae, encrusted crabs, and snails from live oysters I hauled from the ocean floor. I stacked oysters in baskets, cages, and trays, then dumped them back into the sea to grow pearls after they'd been impregnated with beads. I visited third-generation Japanese *amas* whose mothers and grandmothers used to dive topless for pearls. I interviewed pearl doctors—artisans who reshape pearls by carefully peeling away outer skins. I grilled the president of a Pacific Islands pearl-producing nation. I drove hard bargains with cagey dealers and got ripped off (at least in the beginning) before I learned to haggle with the best dealers in the world. Depending on the country, dealer, and pearl strands, it could take hours, even days, to negotiate a price. Whenever I'd arrive in yet another city, I'd make a beeline for every pearl market and dealer showroom I'd been told about. I became pearl-crazed, spending hours studying individual pearls till I got dizzy. I rejected strand after strand with the slightest imperfections in them. Pearls were all I thought

about. Wherever I went, I had vivid, recurring dreams about pearls. I still do.

I was determined to carve a swath that would take me everywhere pearls went. To get at the story, I got my feet massaged by variously skilled reflexologists in four countries. I embarrassed inebriated strangers by wailing off-key karaoke in a profusion of seedy Asian nightclubs. In the Australian Outback, I trekked alongside billabongs teeming with crocodiles. I got introduced to rugby and cricket, and most certainly drank too much ale, as Aussies patiently explained the differences between speckies, marks, tries, torpedo punts, sticky wickets, tracks, and creases. All this was part of getting at the nub of the pearl story.

Unexpected things happen on such open-ended, months-long global peregrinations. Maybe it was over the endless blue expanse of the South Pacific near Tahiti or the calm of the Timor Sea off Australia while sorting pearls moments after they'd emerged from their watery wombs. As I got more and more attached to these perfect spheres, as my appreciation for them deepened, my fascination paradoxically became less about pearls and more about what pearls ultimately represented. Pearls became much more than what meets the eye. Yes, they embody how humans can trick and then coax Mother Nature into producing one of the world's most heavenly objects. That was a nifty trick, but it wasn't what propelled me deeper into pearls. Pearls had grown into metaphors, ways to look at global economics, the environment, fashion, wealth, danger, greed, exploitation, adventure, and the indomitable human spirit.

They also showcased a peculiar history. I discovered that the genesis of the pearl, accepted the world over, used to be that the tiny reflective spheres were actually formed by dewdrops from heaven. Oysters rose to the water's surface, opened their shells, and imbibed droplets of dew that magically transformed into pearls. The world's wise men accepted this theory as indisputable fact for more than 1,000 years.

Throughout my travels, I kept going back to the same question. Why exactly my mania for pearls? Why not for some other object (diamonds, coffee beans, chocolate, ice cream) to use as a prism to observe the world's interconnections? What exactly was it about pearls that led me on this four-year orbit?

It was only after I started my travels did I realize that my quest was a way to renew a postponed love for my mother. In a way, the characteristics of pearls embodied her: elegant, radiant, and strong.

In other words, like a mermaid.

When I was a child, my mother used to wear only on special occasions her one and only pearl necklace. The strand was modest and frugal, as was my family, a reflection of post-Depression, post-World War II. The necklace had been given to my mother by her mother as a wedding present. Preparing to go out for a modest night on the town, perhaps to celebrate their anniversary, my father would dress in a suit and somber tie, my mother would wear a cheerful but demure dress. Following the age-old pearl dictum "last on, first off," my mother would fix her hair and slip into her dress. Then she'd take the glass stopper off a bottle of Shalimar perfume and daintily dab behind each earlobe. It was only when she was finally ready that my mother would ask my father to fasten the clasp to her one extravagance, the pearl necklace. This was always an ordeal, my father struggling with the clasp, my mother waiting anxiously till he got it just right. "Stand still," he'd instruct my mother, sternly and genially.

I was mesmerized by what I thought were mysterious white marbles on a string. I'd marvel at their sheen, but what I remember most was the clean, clicking sound the pearls made when they collided with each other. They had a certain weight and density to them, and they had symmetry, but most of all, they seemed to still be alive. To a little boy, they had magical powers.

Once a year, there they'd be, my parents—two ordinary Americans in the 1950s, arm-in-arm, strolling out the front door of an ordinary suburban home, headed to celebrate another year together, a single strand of pearls leading their way to the future.

Stephen G. Bloom is the author of Tears of Mermaids, Postville, Inside the Writer's Mind, and The Oxford Project (with Peter Feldstein). He is a professor of journalism at the University of Iowa.

Pearl Diving with Mermaid Melissa

The ancient art of pearl diving has been a tradition at SeaWorld over the last 30 years. In 2005 I joined the newest lagoon at The Waterfront in the park to recreate an underwater Atlantis-type setting where people can come watch us pearl dive through huge viewing windows. The reason this is such an amazing job goes deeper than my love for water. Every time someone requests an oyster from me, I sort though and take time to pick out a few of my favorites, as if I were choosing for myself, and then allow the guest to see and touch the shells. I encourage them to turn each one over and see which stands out to them. When a child picks up a shell and starts shaking it to hear the pearl inside, I think of how excited I used to be, shaking presents and trying to guess what was inside. They ask if there is any way to pick a good oyster for the best pearl and I usually reply that each oyster makes its own unique pearl, and no two are ever the same.

The colors range from white, cream, peach, pink, gold, and blue to the rarest of them all, the black pearl. The darker the pearl, the more the value is raised since they are hard to find, and for some reason, the uglier the oyster shell the prettier the pearl. Throughout my day we sort through several hundred oysters, all originally raised in Japan on oyster farms to make akoya pearls. Back when the original pearl divers picked through oysters they called it "farming the oysters."

There are so many beautiful reasons to carry on the pearl diving tradition. Some of my favorite stories involve those parents who wear a pearl pendant on a necklace and share with me how they got the pearl 30 years ago at the park and have returned now with their children to carry on the tradition.

Real pearls can be passed on through generations, and are made of thousands of microscopic crystals and a top layer that's full of luster and shine. They can be five to nine millimeters, and I've seen two-tone-colored pearls that have lovely pink in the center and a peach or cream color on the top layers. This double color effect is due to the fact that real pearls glow from the inside out because of the crystals reflecting the light (much like a prism).

Pearls have an amazing past. In fact, at one time kings, queens, and other royalty were the only ones allowed to wear pearls. Pearls were so priceless that land was bought with them, and knights would carry pearls, believing that their mythical powers would keep them safe in battle. There are even stories of Cleopatra making a bet that she could drink the wealth of an entire country in one glass of wine. She ordered her servants to crush her largest pearl into powder and place it in her drink—and she won the bet!

Finding a gem-quality akoya pearl out in the open ocean is very rare; you only have a one in 10,000 chance! With such rich history, it's no wonder I love pearl diving for people all day long, sharing mother nature's jewelry box, the only gem that is made by a creature of the sea!





Anne Caston

Drowsy on a hospital gurney, pliant
as wave-foam, the stopped heart's plumbed,

breakwater of blood frothing the tubes, the guttered
mind in its dream-state

still, the neurons sleepy-headed
as sunflowers in an autumn field.

Hands work at the wounded
throat; now the correction

is permanent, inscribed by the scalpel
and lance and the nuclear

after-burn of the cautery. She drowns
deep in the chemical

soup of her own undoing. In her mouth now, a fire
and its fever-songs: *O Jerusalem, O Selah,*

O king and kingdom come undone.
She will live—though ever now

as an unrung bell, its clapper
wrenched free, its tumbled white steeple,

its throat-plate of durable silence. When she goes
again to the one she loves, she'll go

unworded and he will love her all the more for that.
She will learn to endure his tenderness

with all the passion and joy of a rain
barrel, water trough, blood bath.

Anne Caston is the author of three books of poetry: Flying Out With The Wounded, Judah's Lion, and the forthcoming Prodigal. Visit her online at this-life-on-a-sandbar.blogspot.com.

MERMAID HOAXES

Timothy Schaffert

The modern-day goth mermaid in art and fashion—with her dark tresses, kohl eyes, and perhaps some steampunky blowfish spines—is most often a celebration of the haunting sexuality of the mythical creature. But look back to the Victorian age, and the very inspiration for gothic style, and you'll find a mermaid spectacle that was an unsexy mix of taxidermy, black-market corpses, and broken-down wharf-side museums.

The audience for mermaid corpses—popular sideshow attractions in the 19th century—was likely a mix of believers and disbelievers. The believers took the taxidermy to be proof of the mermaid's existence (after all, this was a time when many legitimate beasts, such as the dodo and the duckbilled platypus, were dismissed as having never existed at all), while the disbelievers delighted in the showman's tawdry efforts to defraud.

Even by 1878, Charles Dickens Jr.'s weekly publication, *All the Year Round*, referenced the tradition of the mermaid hoax with a weary disdain. In an article about the history of cabinets of curiosity (which were often larger than a cabinet, being a roomful of darkly whimsical detritus), the article's author wrote of the ubiquitous mermaid “made of a monkey's skin fastened as dexterously as none but a Chinaman could fasten it to some fish's tail ... believed in by a much more educated folk than those who frequent Barnum's museum ...”

The business of stitching together the various remains of fish, mammals, amphibians—whatever might produce a god-awful Frankenstein's monster-of-the-sea—seems to have been initiated by the Japanese. In some Victorian publications, a “Japanese mermaid” is a generic term for any mummified mermaid-shaped cadaver. And the gifts of the Japanese mermaid-maker were rumored to be so impressive, a “Japanese mermaid” came to be a metaphor for any exquisite and convincing piece of artifice.

“Yet utterly absurd as they are,” Rev. J.G. Wood writes of mermaid mummies in his book *Trespassers: Showing How the Inhabitants of Earth, Air, and Water Are Enabled to Trespass on Domains Not Their Own* (1875), “there are many persons who firmly believe in them. I once had a narrow escape from a personal assault at the hands of an owner of a Japanese mermaid. I saw it in his shop—a fishmonger's; stepped in to look at it, and made some remarks upon the ingenuity with which wire had been made to imitate ribs and other bones. I thought that I was paying a compliment, but very soon found that the sooner I was out of the shop the better it would be. I have even seen one of these objects in which the artist had been audacious enough to fasten a great pair of bat-like wings to the shoulders.”

Such audacity seemed to be a necessary characteristic for the mermaid-maker of the Victorian age. While some fabricators relied on papier-mâché to an unconvincing degree, the master of his craft would do business with grave robbers and tomb raiders if it meant a more accurate approximation. A mermaid manufacturer confessed in 1866 in *Tid-Bits*, a weekly magazine published in New York, that he'd once used the skeleton of an Indian child (his legs stunted by disease) stolen from a Georgia grave, skin from the shrunken head of a South American, large fish teeth, a fish tail, seaweed, and barnacles to create what he called a “masterpiece” of mermaid hokum. He doctored an affidavit that indicated that a sailor had killed the mermaid with a knife in Hong Kong. He said: “After this I made a number of mermaids; where they are now I don't know. But they have rather gone out of fashion.”



CONTINUED ON PAGE 95

"It's a city that chews people up and spits them out." She was sitting next to him on the banks of New Jersey, listening to him talk. He was smoking a hand-rolled, flicking the ashes into the rocks fringing the Hudson like his stubby mustache. She watched his mouth move with smoke and words. She followed his eyes. There stood the Manhattan skyline, a set of killer chompers, the Chrysler and Empire a pair of fangs, the box-buildings of the projects, molars that would grind and pulverize.

"Yeah, well, you don't know my block," she said. Her block had the only tree in a five-block radius. She imagined its gnarled tawny trunk to be like her backbone, tough after all these years of holding her up and pushing her forward, a bit twisted from the weight of the world. The tree was crowned with a halo of petal green leaves, soft fringe, like baby's eyelashes, like an explosion of good ideas after a drought of creativity, a burst of spring after a long, brutal winter. She loved that tree, it was a misfit, like her. It was probably the only reason she stayed in Manhattan.

"I think it looks more like a row of books," she said, squinting into the sunlight the Hudson was splashing in her eyes. "Like the way disorganized libraries lean on each other."

She leaned on his shoulder and it was bonier than she'd remembered. He smelled of sandpaper and vanilla ice cream. "Tell me more about your block," he said.

She told him about the pale blue stucco box church that looked like it belonged in the dusty desert of the Southwest. She told how she'd spend hours with the tree and the church, writing of places with no tree and no church. The gilded cross crucified the strip of sky between 4th and 5th, sending shadows onto her notebook as she filled it with stories. She told how she had begun to lace white Christmas lights in the heart-branches of her tree one night so it wouldn't feel so out of place in this lit-up City. She had to lean far out her fire escape to get to the tippy-top.

Soon his lit-up-cigarette was the brightest light on the shore. The night had begun to throw its dark blanket over the City sky, obliterating any chance of stars to wish on. The teeth-buildings lit up into a beaming grin, the tip of the Empire suddenly turning blood red because it was almost Valentine's Day.

"Look at that Vampire City," he said. "Luring people in and then sucking their blood right out. He took one last drag before throwing his light into the water. She watched it float downcurrent, against the reflection of Manhattan, a city streaming in silver lines like tearstains on a dark cheek.

She turned to look at his face in the half-dark. There was always something half-dark and beautiful about his face, even in the daytime, like there was a whole side of him she was waiting to be revealed. She'd known him for so long, but there was a part of him that was deeper than she'd ever gotten to, even though she knew how to swim to the bottom of dark waters.

He turned and smiled, his pointy cusps growing in front of her eyes. She always loved that part, like they were excited to see her.

She lifted her skirt a bit, and they both watched her legs fuse and extend into a long blue-silver tail, like Daryl Hannah's in *Splash*. Only prettier.

"It's a city of magic, only everyone is chasing the wrong kind," she smiled, and so did he, the whites of his eyes gleaming as white as his fangs. His bright smile lit up the branches of her heart, she felt less alone next to him. She flexed her tail like Popeye's bicep, catapulting herself into the water. She disappeared under the frothy surface, only to reappear several feet away. She turned to him and waved high like an Olympic swimmer. When she returned, she had the seaweed hair and saltwater lips he always wished to puncture, but Mermaid blood wasn't good for him.

He waited for her to return with handfuls of little silver fish wiggling like extra fingers in her palms. He would puncture them underneath their eyeballs and suck on them like half-empty ice-cream cones. It was a dirty habit, but it kept him from dirtier ones, she figured. She always said a little prayer for the fish as she scooped them up with her long fingers, the kind of prayer she heard while sitting outside the blue stucco church on her block in her Daytime Life.

Her daytime life was one of walking and writing and waitressing at the restaurant. Everyone at the restaurant assumed she was an actress, and she just said yes, for she was always pretending to be something she wasn't. Normal like the girls who came into the restaurant with their boyfriends and split the bill. Normal, like the owner, who paced back and forth counting busboys' mistakes and bar tips till nighttime.

Nighttime was always messier than Day, even for normal people. She'd watch them roll out of the restaurant on Friday nights at two in the morning like rowdy sailors on port call. They'd swerve like vampires with full bellies, leaning into each other's necks. She would watch for the glint of fangs, but never saw them. What she saw were watery eyes, like everyone had been swimming too long and had gulped too much saltwater. Drinking too much saltwater was an easy way to forget, every guilty mermaid and merman knew that. She wondered what these land creatures could want to forget so badly. She watched them lean out the restaurant door, sea sick into the night streets, then totter off like small boats in choppy waters.

But Monday nights she did not have to pretend. Monday nights she could lean on his shoulder and watch the sky turn off and the city turn on. Monday nights she could grow into herself and he could, too, and no one would flinch.

Sarah Herrington has written books of poetry and non-fiction. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, and O the Oprah Magazine, and she's currently completing a project of young adult fiction. Sarahherrington.com.

Sarah Herrington **VAMPIRE CITY**

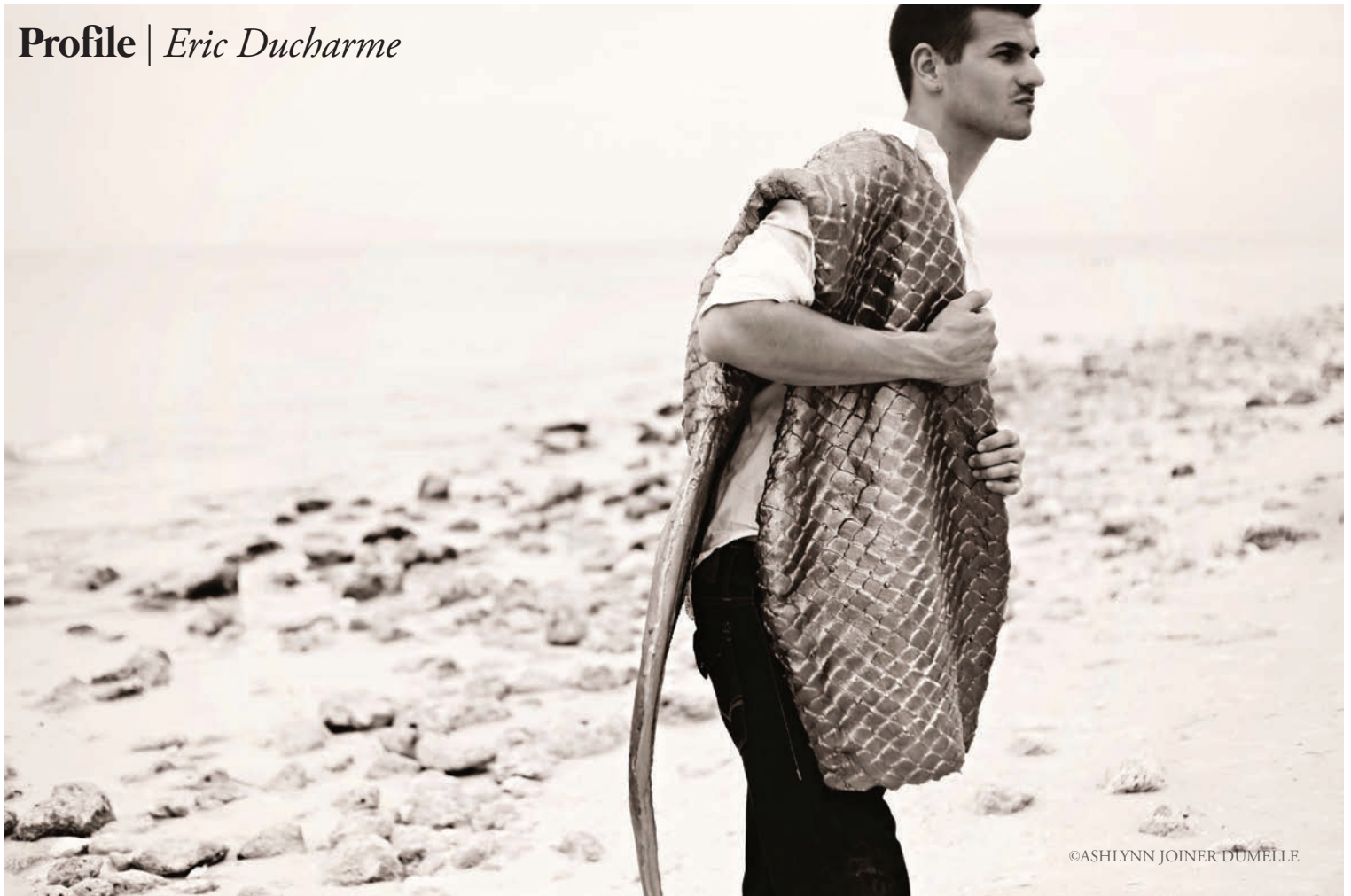




ERIC DUCHARME *by Carolyn Turgeon*

The Mertailor





At age 23, Eric Ducharme has already been in business for himself for nearly ten years, working out of his garage in Homosassa Springs, Florida, and selling some of the most beautiful mermaid tails out there. He's made mermaid tails for places like Weeki Wachee Springs and Sacramento's Dive Bar, for celebrities like Lady Gaga, Pit Bull and Flo Rida, and for international clients like Lavazza coffee and "Germany's Next Top Model." When I visited his studio recently, I was mesmerized by the tails surrounding us: shimmering pale blues shifting into lavender and gold; rich glittering magentas, greens, and browns; bright reds and pale oranges bleeding into coral. Entering his studio is a bit like entering the domain of a mad scientist, too, with bits of mottled and scaled plastic material hanging down like raw chicken skin and various molds and chemicals and paint jars scattered everywhere. Magical things happen here.

But Eric is far from satisfied, despite his achievements. He recently debuted the market's first recreational flipper monofin—like regular flippers stuck together and in a gorgeous mermaid fluke—that users can attach to a separate piece to make a full-blown tail. "Basically, the idea is to promote everyday use of a mermaid tail for recreational exercise and fun," he says. He also continually works to make all of his tails as true to life as possible. His silicone tails come close to the kind of realism he wants, but not close enough. "I don't think anyone's made a truly realistic tail yet," he says, "and I want to be the first person to create it." He estimates that he spends many thousands of dollars on materials and experiments with at least

two or three different materials every week, in a constant search for perfection. "I want it to look like you chopped off a fish and put it on someone's leg," he says, laughing. Really, what he wants is to make mermaids, the fantasy and beauty of them, as real as human skin and bones. "I want to take the dreams you have at night and turn them into reality," he says.

Mermaids have been a part of Eric's life for as long as he can remember. He grew up in the shadow of Weeki Wachee Springs, where he started attending mermaid camps as a child. "My first memory at Weeki Wachee was standing in front of the glass, so close I could hear and feel the bubbles as I watched a dark-haired mermaid swim by in a gold lamé mermaid tail." When he was nine, former mermaid Barbara Wynns took him under her wing and gave him his first mermaid tail. As she tells it, "He asked for a Weeki tail, so I went to the big scrap box and got him one. I told him not to bring it to the springs. But he would show up with his backpack and it was always in there." Barbara got him scuba certified when he was 13. For years she picked him up every day after school and on the weekends and took him to swim at Weeki Wachee. To this day, the old-time glamour of the legendary park and the current and former mermaids seem to infuse Eric's vision of the world, and he considers Barbara his best friend. Barbara herself glows with pride when she talks about him—"He's a flashing light of creative energy and channels it wherever he needs it," she says—as do all the former mermaids at Weeki Wachee.

In fact, Eric himself started performing there at age 16, when he was cast as the prince in one of the shows. Earlier than that, at age 14, he began making tails for Weeki, donating them at first and then filling orders. It was another strong female in his life, his own grandmother, who taught him how to sew. “I cannot remember the first time I ever created a tail, but I can think back to all of the times I tried. From garbage bags, masking tape, fabric, bed sheets, you name it, it was a mermaid tail. My grandmother sewed me tails, one after another. She eventually got tired and said that I needed to learn how to make my own. She taught me some basic sewing techniques and I took over. I got pretty good with my little sewing machine!”

As Mertailor Inc. approaches its tenth year of business, things are busier than ever. In spring 2013, Eric gained international exposure by appearing on TLC’s new reality show “My Crazy Obsession” wearing a tail himself. What resulted was a media frenzy, with articles about the “real-life merman” appearing all over the world. “It was crazy,” Eric says. “My world changed in an instant.” When I talked to Eric for this article, he was in the middle of shooting for a TV station in Germany; articles about him were about to appear in *Maxim* and *W Magazine*; and he had just shot footage for an exciting—and secret—possible new production. Every day he fields calls from everyone from international pop stars to corporations like Target.

Now Eric is starting to expand his mermaid vision into clothing and accessories, and wants to open his own brand of underwater glamour to the world at large. Expect handbags and underwear made from silicone mermaid scales—his own signature tail patterns—mermaid-scale shoes with pearl-and-shell-encrusted heels, tees with mermaids and mermen drawn on them and embellished with crystals, and extravagant, over-the-top jewelry.

He also has plans to produce a clothing line in the next year or two, featuring “seaweed and kelp” dresses made of chiffon and decorated with pearls and shells, in various shades of green, as well as flowing tops in the same style that might be paired with custom-fit jeans with mermaid-scale pockets. He has visions of elaborate, fluffy ballroom gowns that might have come from the bottom of the sea; top hats embellished with starfish, sea fans, pearls, and fish netting; silver and gold-plated jewelry embellished with rubies and emeralds. A visit to his home will reveal velvet jackets with crystal mermaids outlined on the back, shimmering flowing shirts and dresses, scale- and seashell-covered bra tops, and thick sketchbooks full of penciled drawings.

When I ask Eric why he loves mermaids so much, he says, “I don’t know. I’ve just been such an artistic person from such a young age, painting and designing, putting things together and taking them apart.” But it’s clear that Eric grew up surrounded by the fantasy of mermaids, and, specifically, of Weeki Wachee Springs, that magical place that sprang up in 1947 in the wilds of Florida to lure travelers off the road and into a dreamscape where beautiful women ate bananas and drank soda underwater. It doesn’t seem like a kid like Eric would have stood a chance, given his artistic temperament and propensity toward beauty and fantasy, with all that glamour so close by. Weeki was the perfect haven for the shy, dreamy child he was.

But he grew up to embrace its uniqueness, as well as his own. As Eric says now, “Mermaid tails are not everybody’s cup of tea, but I want to be unusual. I want to be the male merman version of Lady Gaga.” He goes on to describe how the pop and fashion icon inspires him: “Yes, Lady Gaga sings, but, more than that, she always takes everything above and beyond, to the next level. She



Project Mermaids

Eric is working with photographers Angelina Venturella and Chiara Salomoni on Project Mermaids, a coffee table book aiming to raise awareness for the world's oceans and funds for Saveourbeach.org. Learn more at Projectmermaids.com.



©PROJECT MERMAIDS BY ANGELINA VENTURELLA/CHIARA SALOMONI



©CHRIS CRUMLEY

takes unusual concepts and makes them real. That's what I aspire to do." And while some kids wanted to grow up to be superheroes, he "wanted to grow up and be a merman and make mermaid tails. Now I want to help people who had the same dreams make them a reality."

I ask Eric where he sees himself in ten years, and he talks about having a mermaid empire that not only includes his tails, which he remains passionate about—perfecting them as well as developing more affordable fabric tails for children, since "six out of ten girls want to be a mermaid"—and his mermaid-inspired clothing and accessories, but also a mermaid-themed nightclub that would take his vision even further. He describes an underwater facility featuring beautiful, choreographed underwater burlesque shows. "I want it to be a place where people can sit down and experience something like they've never seen before," he says. "Like Weeki Wachee, but with different performances all the time, so that you're constantly amazed." He also mentions Cirque du Soleil, how you can see one show over and over and constantly discover new things. "I want to take people into this incredible fantasy," he says.

Listening to him, I am quite sure I want to go to such a place—and to be, for those few hours, inside Eric's head, with all its crazy aquatic dreams and visions.

And with the same confidence and drive he seems to have been born with, he adds, "I don't see why I can't do exactly that."

“I want it to be a place where people can experience something they’ve never seen before.”



**SO I BECAME
A MERMAID**

*Autumn
Whitefield-Madrano*

i became a mermaid shortly before I became a woman. Certainly at age eight I was neither, at least not in a literal sense, but when one grows up precocious in a landlocked state, imagination and projection combine to make you what you cannot be. So I became a mermaid. The process was simple enough: I would lie in our mauve porcelain bathtub, shimmy down until everything but my face was in the water, cross my legs at the ankle to approximate a fishtail, and flop about. Nothing much would happen from there; I might arrange my hair so as to cover my nonexistent breasts—I had no shell brassiere available—and perhaps a few underwater bubbles would be blown. Then the bathwater would get cold, or dinner would be ready, and I'd leave my sea with no one the wiser.

That was age eight. At age nine, my bathroom ritual shifted. Instead of crossing my legs at the ankles, I began to suck in my stomach; instead of witnessing my physical form with my own eyes, I began to stand in front of the mirror. If I exhaled fully and allowed my belly to be loose, my silhouette took on the slightest hint of an inward curve at the waist, but then my unsatisfactory stomach would be protruding when viewed from the side. If I sucked in my belly and tightened my muscles, my profile was sleek—as sleek as the profile of a nine-year-old sporting Sally Jessy Raphael glasses can be, anyway—but I lost my shadow of a nipped-in waist. Which to choose? Sleek side profile or nascent hourglass? Do I suck in or let it all hang out?

There are all sorts of things I could say about the change from mermaid to woman—things about body image and societal ideals and the symbolism of a child on the eve of puberty mimicking a mythical figure in a perpetual state of transformation. But it's the self-surveillance that stands out to me now: the vigilance I paid to the image of myself. Before becoming a mermaid, I may have playacted in front of the mirror or taken joy in appropriating my mother's finery, but in those moments I was engaged with the act of play. In the bathtub, play was secondary to watching myself play.

When channeling my mermaid, I'd imagine choice bits from my favorite fairy tale, *The Little Mermaid* (conveniently forgetting the parts that didn't fit into my fantasy, like that whole walking-on-knives-for-eternity bit), but it wasn't a reverie so much as it was method acting in a performance with an audience of one. Nearly 30 years after I last became a mermaid, I can still remember the smallest details—the nubby yellow washcloth on the side of the tub, the row of lily-of-the-valley bath cubes lining the shelf above me, a hanging spider plant I could see if I tilted my head back. The visuals mattered to me, the act of drinking myself in among the scenery. My hair reached mid-back, and I'd strain my neck trying to hit the sweet spot at which my hair would be submerged enough in the bathwater to swirl about in an appropriately mermaid-like fashion but allow my head to be upright enough for me to witness my own glory. For if I couldn't watch myself being a mermaid, I didn't want to be one at all.

"All love requires the duality of a subject and an object," wrote Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. Women often turn their mirror image into that object to be loved—but before that, we turn to other forms of doubling ourselves. By not merely pretending to be a mermaid but also watching myself become one, I created my double, setting myself up for what art critic John Berger refers to as the surveyor and the surveyed. "A woman must continually watch herself," he writes in *Ways of Seeing*. "Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father,

she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping ... And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman." With my self-made mermaid, I wanted to witness myself as a vision of fantastic piscine loveliness. The surveyor within was still keeping vigilant watch, but the criteria were different than they'd soon become, lacking the angst of choosing which version of my prepubescent belly I should bring forth into the public sphere. The ideal mermaid vision I had in my head was a character; she wasn't the flesh-and-blood women I knew I was actually destined to resemble.

Mermaids cannot be watched by humans. They can be watched by other mermaids, of course, but as far as homo sapiens go, mermaids are viewed only in glimpses—as long as you can hold your breath, or as long as they're willing to sacrifice the fluid comfort of home in order to be seen by you. Even fairies roam the earth with humans; mermaids are of this world, just not a world we have access to. If mermaids put on a show, it's a private one.

So when I think back to an eight-year-old girl crossing her ankles to make a mermaid tail in her bathtub, it makes an odd sort of sense. Long before my mermaid year, I'd understood that my destiny was womanhood, which meant that my destiny was to be watched. Letting my hair loose under the water and taking myself in as a vision was a trial run, preparation for being watched on a larger stage. Behind the safety of a locked bathroom door, I learned how to watch myself with a mermaid's privacy, inaccessible to the eyes of others who might, in a few years, be all too willing to see me.

In talk of girls and self-esteem, there's much attention paid to not letting girls absorb harmful messages about beauty standards—and, to a lesser degree, there's vigilance about encouraging girls to not settle for passive roles. To not settle for merely being seen. It's a worthy goal, one I support; I want girls to know themselves as subjects, not objects. But I can't help but wonder if, in the rush to make sure girls don't lapse into passivity, we've forgotten that it is wholly possible to take a private pleasure in being watched. The difference between watching myself become a mermaid and watching the shape of my belly change with my breath lay not in the act of observation but in the act of criticism, of applying shoulds and shouldn'ts to my very form.

In the nearly 30 years since I cast myself as a mermaid, I've occasionally taken great pleasure in being watched. Sometimes I might be watched for the intangible gifts I bring to this world; other times I might be watched because I inhabit a woman's form, with a waist that eventually did get a bit more nipped-in. But those times have a price, whether it be bouts of debilitating self-consciousness or the pain of walking upon swords with every step, paying my high-heeled penance for the mere chance of being seen by the right person (any person). My mermaid hour had no price, no tax, no toll. In that bathtub, I inhabited a rare space between two worlds: knowing it would behoove me to be seen, but without the pressures of knowing exactly what role I was supposed to be playing.

It may not have been the most creative form of play I could have engaged in at age eight. But despite being a prelude to the slow march of objectification, it was liberating nonetheless.

Autumn Whitefield-Madrano writes about beauty at the-beheld.com, and is currently writing a book on the same subject for Simon & Schuster. Her essays have been published in Glamour, Salon, and Marie Claire.

Judith Barrington

SOULS UNDER WATER

No longer tumbled by currents as when
long ago they were lodgers in frail bodies,
now they drift free of the flesh that was sucked
and nibbled from bones and the blood that swirled
away, its quick red streaking the deeps.

Souls mingle in the democracy of weed.
Passing through great barnacled bulkheads,
once-passengers, transparent without furs or jewels,
glide through the shiver that marks the presence
of stoker or convict, or the drunken oilman

who one night staggered to the edge of the spider-legged rig
and dreaming of his girlfriend—unusually tender
in his mind at that dizzy moment—plunged through cans
and plastic trash, into the arms of another.
Welcome, said the souls, though his ears heard nothing.


No longer sailors nor slaves, still they remember
the struck bell piercing sleep, the darkness
below decks where rats splashed in the bilges,
the wide-eyed newborn who flew over the deck rail
saved from the plantation by her mother's arm.

Oceans are thick with them: submariners floating
free of their vaults and pilots whose planes dropped
from the sky like giant guillemots but failed to surface
with a catch of fish. The careless were snatched
by sneaker waves, the joyful by cruising sharks

who dispatched them with a lunge and spat out
their splintered surfboards. Some are surprised
to find themselves here, having thought they'd ascend
to the heaven of upper airs or deep star space. But
these are the heavens, say the souls: the heavens below.

"Souls Under Water" from *Postcard from the Bottom of the Sea*
(*The Eighth Mountain Press, 2008*)

*Judith Barrington is the author of three poetry collections, a
prizewinning memoir, and a text on writing literary memoir.
Her work has been included in numerous anthologies and
literary journals. Learn more at Judithbarrington.com.*



Malena Sharkey is an avid diver, scuba instructor, and charter boat dive master who also happens to moonlight as a mermaid model. Malena and Robert Minnick run Portsmouth's Chesapeake Bay Diving Center and Way Beyond Productions and sponsor diving trips all over the place—including trips integrating diving with underwater photography and mermaid modeling. "I love being underwater," she says. "To me it's like being in church, feeling one with the earth. It's where I feel most at home."

The most famous and long-standing mermaid at New York's annual Coney Island Mermaid Parade is the exuberant Bambi the Mermaid, who's been obsessed with carnivals and country fairs since she was a kid. Now she's the producer of Coney Island's *Burlesque at the Beach*, NYC's oldest and longest-running burlesque show, where she's performed not only as a mermaid but as a crab, lobster, giant clam, sea snail, and Siamese fighting fish. Find out more at Cornstar.com.



Jerilyn Winstead

SO YOU WANT TO BE A MERMAID

©ANDREW BRUSSO

You've watched Princess Ariel singing, swimming, and twirling in her undersea world a hundred times. Now it's your turn! You want to be the one in a shimmering mermaid tail, slipping through a magical world making friends with the fish and the dolphins.

These days, you can actually do it. Of course, we can't breathe underwater, but we can put on a sparkly mermaid tail and learn to hold our breath as we explore the underwater world.

The first thing you'll need is a mermaid tail. For those who can sew, there are instructions online on how to make your own mermaid tail (or you can check out Mermaid Iona and Malinghi's article on page 91, which contains complete instructions).

You can also buy a mermaid swim tail from an online store: many of these tails are custom-made to fit you perfectly, have lots of colors and styles to choose from, and come with a monofin inside.

Once you have your mermaid tail, you'll want to practice swimming in it. You can't walk in these tails, so make sure you're at the water or edge of the pool when you put yours on. Then just slip into the water and give it a try.

It feels a little weird at first, your legs together, forcing you to swim the Dolphin Kick. But after about ten minutes, you'll feel completely used to it. Your Dolphin Kick will get lots of practice as you mermaid all over the place. The monofin inside of the tail moves you through the water with power, and it's an amazing feeling. As soon as you feel comfortable, practice swimming underwater, holding your breath and with your eyes open. You'll look more like a real mermaid if you can swim with eyes open and a smile on your face. Don't puff out your cheeks!

Learning to swim comfortably underwater is a fun challenge. Always make sure you have a friend watching over you as you practice. Never hold your breath too long—only until you start feeling the pressure for air. Don't push it—long, relaxed practices are the best for breath-holding. The secret to holding your breath is to relax your body as much as you can, the way you do before falling asleep. When you're relaxed, your heart rate slows down,

and you need less air. Professional mermaids have discovered that the longer they swim in the water, the longer they can hold their breath. It happens naturally as you swim underwater more and more.

To look and feel like a real mermaid, it's best if you can learn to swim without any goggles or nose plugs. Your eyes may sting for a bit, and you'll need to learn to blow air out of your nose to keep water from coming in. These two skills are challenges for some people, and easy for others. If you really must wear goggles or nose plugs, make sure they're clear (no blue or other colors on them) so that they're not too noticeable. The more you practice, the more you'll be able to swim without goggles or nose plugs, and the more you'll look like a real mermaid!

Now for the fun part. You've practiced all the basics, now it's time to dance. Start learning how to do forward rolls, then backward rolls. Try doing a backward roll turned sideways (so you're parallel to the floor of the pool). Try swimming upside down underwater, your face to the sun. You can come up with all sorts of neat mermaid twirls and turns and tricks. Learn to do several tricks, then pop up for a quick breath of air and go right back down again. You'll amaze everyone around you, as you learn the mermaid dance.

When you're ready to relax, have fun swimming the Dolphin Kick underwater as slowly as you can. The more slowly you move, the more beautiful and graceful you look, and the longer you can stay underwater. If you're lucky enough to mermaid in the ocean, be sure to always have a companion watching over you, and have fun swimming with the fish among the coral reefs.

Whether in the pool or the ocean, you'll feel like a true mythical creature gliding through the mysterious blue world. There's nothing else in the world like it!

Jerilyn Winstead is a busy mother of four who manages two mermaid businesses (AquaTails and Mermaid Cove Swim School in Colorado Springs), homeschools her teen son, and tries to keep up with her many hobbies and interests, including mermaiding, writing, and medieval reenactment.

NAUSICAA REMEMBERS

Sarah Porter

The old man was blind. His eyes were milk-colored domes with only a trace of brown iris showing through. When he ran a few searching fingers over my scales his face clouded. “Feathers?” he murmured.

“Scales,” I informed him, but he seemed to be mostly deaf as well, or possibly he was only capable of responding to words when they mapped the shape of a story.

“Feathers,” he croaked again. “Half bird, half woman ...”

Have it your way, old man, I thought. Vague forms snaked slowly through the milk of his eyes; ideas were beginning to take shape, groping for the whispers that might contain them.

Human, I thought. But his lack of sight seemed to leave a chink in that humanity. I decided that, since he couldn’t guess so much as my appearance, it might be permissible for me to let slip a few hints and perhaps guide the course of his story.

“Only one ship ever escaped us,” I told him.

He looked transfixed. The waves’ foam drew falling streaks of reflection on his eyes. I couldn’t tell how much he understood, or even if he’d heard me.

“The oars cut white wounds through the breakers,” I told him. “We heard the sailors in the distance, and their voices were quick with anxiety as they scrolled up their sails in the breathless calm. We knew from that they’d heard of us, and we smiled to think how little use foreknowledge would be to them. We smiled, and we listened not only to their chatter, but also to the song of their thoughts breaking. We heard those secret words below the words each man lent voice to: his heart’s longings, his self that never parts the surface of the mind’s sea but instead remains hidden. We listened, the better to know our quarry and the better to craft our songs to echo their desires.

“The ship came into view, beating its way around the rocks. One mind was louder than the rest: raucous with self-regard and violent ambition. His thoughts displayed a sharp desire to know everything, but only in order to control it. One of the twins began laughing hysterically at the timbre of that mind. ‘One for you, Nausicaa!’ she told me. ‘Tell him that what he hungers for is wisdom, not compliments. Tell him that, having seen through him, we alone know his true worth and can grant him the exalted knowledge he deserves.’

“I was nearly as amused by the prospect as she was. The man seemed walled in satisfaction; his every thought curled like an infuriating smile. Each shiver of his mind was a provocation,

and I could hardly wait to take him down. His men receded in my imagination: brittle death-scrip, pale afterthoughts.

“We swam out together: quick-finned and streamered in foam through the gem-green Aegean. Behind us slanting masts stabbed dark lines around the shores of our island, and fractured decks sloped down into aquamarine shallows. We swam out, linked hand to hand and delirious with our own grace. Our voices rose: wordlessly we called to them, our music following the channels of their dreams. To the man against the mast, I sang the message as the twin had instructed me.

“But something was very wrong. The men onboard seemed emptied, dragging at their oars as if they had no minds at all, much less secrets we could conjure with our music. They seemed chaff in the shapes of men, conducted by an unseen wind. We had the power to give them their truest selves, but they stood unable to receive our gift.

“All but their captain, jerking helplessly against the mast. He was captured by my song, but ropes restrained him from flinging himself into the sea.

“I understood, then. We had been duped into becoming mere servants of this man’s egotism. He would live, and his story of encountering us would be but another decoration on his clever lips. The more I told him what he wished to hear, the worse our disgrace would become.”

All the time I spoke, I thought the blind old man could not hear me. His thoughts formed a rattling chamber of swords and luminous faces. But when I stopped for a moment he let out a shrill, tremulous moan, urgent with longing. I decided to tell him the rest.

“I changed my song, then. Each note I sang became a fine blade, sweet and brutal, cutting his heart with the knowledge of his true self. I told him how I saw him, and I knew the figure I revealed to him would live on in his heart, a puppet carved from reeking meat. And it would never cease bleeding.

“I knew he would tell no one of the self I’d forced him to recognize. I knew that instead he would murder more people than we ever could. I told him this as well: that he would try to clean his house and his heart with blood, but every drop would only spell his shame.”

Sarah Porter is the author of the Lost Voices trilogy (Lost Voices, Waking Storms, and The Twice Lost). Learn more at Sarahporterbooks.com.



“ *The man who has not given himself completely to the sea and wind and the cold sting of the waves will never know all the meaning of life.* ”

THE ORIGINAL MERMAID

By Raina the Halifax Mermaid





You could say that professional mermaiding began in 1904, when young Australian swimmer Annette Kellerman dove into a glass tank at the Melbourne Exhibition Hall and swam with eels and seals and tropical fish as a crowd gathered and her sister walked around with a hat. Nearly 50 years later, she would be immortalized by Esther Williams in *Million Dollar Mermaid*. Over a century later, when professional mermaiding is officially a *thing*, not only for me but for women and men all over the world, I look to her as my main inspiration. She was ground-breaking. And being the original mermaid was only the beginning.

Born in 1886 in Sydney, Kellerman was afflicted with a type of paralysis that kept her isolated and in leg braces until her doctor prescribed swimming as therapy when she was seven. She took joy in the little differences she noticed in her legs as she swam, and as her legs and fitness improved she began to swim competitively.

Kellerman's family was finding it hard to make ends meet when she and her sister went to look for jobs at the local aquarium in Melbourne. Her sister joked that Kellerman should perform with the fish. Kellerman proposed the idea and was hired. Soon after she acquired a long glittery mermaid tail and earned the nickname "Mermaid."

In 1904 Kellerman and her father moved to England, where she announced that she would swim a section of the Thames. She dove into the dirty water and did the 42-kilometer swim. No man had ever made this attempt. The next day she was on the front page of the daily newspaper with the name "Australian Mermaid."

Three years later Kellerman headed to Chicago, where she continued to entertain and became the highest-paid vaudeville star in the US. Her father appointed a new manager, Jimmie Sullivan. They eventually fell in love and moved to Boston.

An early champion for women's rights, Kellerman was very much responsible for the modern-day one-piece swimsuit. At the time, women were expected to swim in bathing gowns and forbidden to show any bare leg. Finding the gowns constricting, she started performing in a skin-tight unitard, and then a bathing suit. She was arrested for her swimwear in Boston but managed to have the case dismissed by proving to the judge how previous swim outfits were too restrictive. Her risqué new look end up becoming the height of fashion.

Harvard University Professor Dudley Sargent, who had been researching the female body for 25 years, believed that Kellerman was the first woman whose form was almost as perfect as that of the Venus De Milo. He was so sure that he pulled her onstage at Harvard in her bathing suit and declared to his students that she was the real "perfect woman." She preferred to be known for her capabilities and fitness and expressed that she did not want "to be known as just a pretty fish."

Kellerman's first major movie, *Neptune's Daughter*, was produced in 1914. Two years later she starred in the film *A Daughter of the Gods*, the first million-dollar movie, in which she appeared as a nude goddess. The movie was a roaring success, and featured 150 "mermaids" all trained by Kellerman. She performed dangerous stunts such as diving with crocodiles (and made everyone in the cast keep these stunts secret from her husband until the movie's premiere!).

Kellerman went on to perform with the likes of Grace Kelly and Coco Chanel. In 1937 she moved to Florida and worked with many charities, even advising President Roosevelt on exercises for his polio-affected leg. She eventually returned to Australia to live by the Great Barrier Reef and humorous legends unfurled of a Kellerman who swam through shark-infested waters to do her shopping and hitched rides back on local boats.

With the 1952 movie production *Million Dollar Mermaid*, Kellerman was once again the center of attention. She said little about the movie except that the actress who portrayed her was beautiful (though she didn't care much for anything below her neck). This beautiful actress was, of course, Esther Williams.

A trailblazer for women's rights, the first woman to wear a tail, fitness and health pioneer, vaudeville star, and endless inspiration to water-loving performers like me, Annette Kellerman was the quintessential all-around mermaid. She passed away in 1975, but her legacy lives on as more and more people slip on tails and take to the water to live out their own dreams.

Raina the Halifax Mermaid owns Halifax Mermaids and is the author of Fishy Business: How to be a Mermaid. Visit Halifaxmermaids.com.

Hot Witches by Dame Darcy Little Mermaid

THE LITTLE MERMAID WAS VERY GOOD AT ALL THE CLASSES SHE TOOK AT ATLANTIS SCHOOL OF FISH.

HER FAVORITES WERE... SEA CPR/SEA SAFETY, WATER BALLET, AND SINGING/MUSIC.

SHE LOVED HER FATHER WHO, THOUGH STRICT, WAS VERY KINDLY.

DON'T GO NEAR THE SHORE... HE WARNED.

HUMANS LIVE THERE AND YOU MUST NOT TRIFLE WITH THEM.

ONE DAY, HOWEVER, SHE WITNESSED A GREAT SHIPWRECK, AND SAW A HANDSOME YOUNG SAILOR LYING ON THE BEACH, SEEMINGLY LIFELESS.

HE WENT TO SHORE AND CLEARED HIS BREATHING PATHWAY OF WATER, THEN PERFORMED MOUTH TO MOUTH RESUSCITATION ON HIM.

HE AWOK TO FIND A BEAUTIFUL MERMAID KISSING HIM. UPON SEEING THIS, HE WAS OF COURSE OVERWHELMED WITH LOVE.

THE LITTLE MERMAID SAW HE WAS QUITE THE CATCH AS WELL, SO SHE THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

I HAVE TO GO ASK MY FATHER.

YOU MUST MARRY ME, ETHEREAL MAIDEN OF THE SEA!

SHE THEN QUICKLY SWAM TO ATLANTIS. WHEN HER FATHER FOUND OUT WHAT SHE HAD DONE, HE WAS VERY ANGRY.

HOW DARE YOU DISOBEY MY ORDERS!

IF YOU MARRY A HUMAN, YOUR FIN WILL SPLIT INTO TWO LEGS, WHICH IS VERY VERY PAINFUL. AND EVERY STEP YOU TAKE WILL BE LIKE WALKING ON BROKEN GLASS.

THEN YOU WILL LOSE YOUR VOICE AND NOT BE ABLE TO SPEAK OR SING.

AND FINALLY, IF YOU WANT TO RETURN TO ATLANTIS, OR EVEN SWIM IN THE SEA, YOU WILL BECOME SEA FOAM.

SHE SWAM TO SHORE, WHERE SHE FOUND THE HANDSOME SAILOR WAITING.

ALTHOUGH IT HURTS TO TELL YOU THIS, I CAN NOT MARRY YOU, FOR I WOULD LOSE TOO MUCH.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND I NEED TO KEEP MY LIBERTY AND LIFE. MAY YOU HAVE HEALTH AND HAPPINESS AND FIND TRUE LOVE ON SHORE!

SHE THEN KISSED HIM GOOD-BYE AND SWAM AWAY!!!

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LITTLE MERMAID THEN?

I KNOW THAT FIRST LOVE IS A STRONG THING, AND THEY SAY THE DEEPEST CUT IS THE FIRST CUT.

I WOULD RATHER YOU HAVE A TEMPORARY BROKEN HEART THAN LOSE MY PRECIOUS DAUGHTER ALTOGETHER.

THE LITTLE MERMAID THOUGHT OF WHAT HER FATHER SAID, AND DECIDED THAT HAVING A VOICE AND BEING ABLE TO SPEAK HER MIND WAS VERY IMPORTANT.

WELL SHE CRIED A LOT ON HER CORAL BED, AND TALKED TO HER MERMAID FRIENDS ON HER SHELL PHONE.

UNTIL SHE EVENTUALLY FELT BETTER.

AFTER A WEEK OR TWO, SHE EVEN MET A CUTE MERMAN IN SEA SAFETY CLASS!!!

AND THEY STARTED SURFING TOGETHER AFTER SCHOOL.

WHEN SHE INTRODUCED HIM TO HER FATHER, HE APPROVED, SAYING:

I'M GLAD YOU FOUND SOMEONE WHO APPRECIATES AND SUPPORTS YOU FOR WHO YOU ARE.

The End

Natalie Case **MERMAID**

there was a time when our bodies fit neatly
inside the sunken tub
but i can't quite remember when
or how
and now our limbs are everywhere
but still in the water warm
your makeup leaking
in the water your body looks like a child's but different, clearly
*(breasts, and your hips sticking out
thin skin
covering fragile bones)*

you used to be afraid of mirrors
never looking in them at night afraid
the "other you" would take your soul
i think that happens now
when you look in the mirror every night
studying your body and crying at the other you
that's swallowing you up

mom almost named you ocean
and if i could i'd make you a mermaid
in water always moving
never thinking you need makeup
eating fish and seaweed
in water you'd never think about cleaning the kitchen
and with a silver tail you'd never worry about your thighs
girl of water
you'd just float

Natalie Case is a student at UC Santa Cruz. She's been writing poems since high school and believing in mermaids since forever.



Legally named "Mermaid," Melissa has dedicated her life to promoting "ocean education through underwater entertainment." Her slogan? "Let's help save the oceans before all creatures become mythical." She makes appearances around the world performing underwater showcases with her Mermaid Melissa LLC aquatic company, which includes a team of trained professional mermaids and her merman partner. With nine years of hands-on experience as a pro free diver and underwater performer, she hopes to take her traveling mermaid tank and bus tour on the road to a town near you!

Image courtesy of Mermaidmelissa.com



*Annaliese Moyer
Tassano* **PHOTOGRAPHING
MERMAIDS**

i started photographing mermaids in my youth when sailing with my family. Sadly, all those Instamatic pictures were not of high enough quality for anyone to be able to make out the mermaids in them. I wonder now if that is part of what drove me subconsciously to become a professional photographer. It does seem awfully synchronous that I am photographing them now, doesn't it?

My recent experience with mermaids came about as a result of the mermaid tank. On a local theatrical group's page, I saw that Portland's Theatre Vertigo wanted to get rid of their tank from their production of *Freakshow*. They needed to be out of the theater, and no one in the company could or wanted to give this glorious set piece a home. I mused that it would fit in with my vintage/distressed kind of aesthetic, so I emailed to say I'd be interested. I was saddened to hear that someone else had claimed it first. But their deadline day rolled around and I got a frantic

phone call. The person who had dibs on the tank had not shown up. Could I get there with a truck and collect it ... immediately? Luckily for me, my neighborhood is filled with inventors and creatives and makers of all kinds, many of whom have trucks to aid in those efforts. I borrowed one, drove downtown, and claimed my tank. I did not yet know it was a mermaid tank. I did not even know what I might wind up doing with it.

Within a day or two, I heard from my friend Tanya Burka, world-renowned aerialist. "Hey Annaliese," she said, "I'm going to be in town next week. I owe you some modeling. Do you have anything in mind?" Hmmm ... tank ... gorgeous performing artist/contortionist ... MERMAID! Tanya was more than game to be the first mermaid in the tank. I made my first mermaid tail from a scary old lace tablecloth, and my friend John Wenderoth, one of said genius creative makers in my neighborhood and a handsome devil to boot, helped set up the tank

on a stand in my carport. Yep, almost all the mermaid images to date were made in the carport. As I told him about the shoot that was shaping up, he said, "I'll get in the tank with the mermaid lady." Immediately I saw the whole story for the shoot.

That first shoot was grueling. Technically, I was flying by the seat of my pants. Water, reflections, electricity, submerged subjects ... but the result was magnificent. The images from that shoot were the most beautiful things I had ever created. One is the cover of my web site (Stagerightphoto.com), and another graces my business card (and serves as the final end papers for last year's Spectrum art book).

Obviously, mermaid makeup must be waterproof. Most of my fair subjects have used regular makeup and applied a theatrical product to keep makeup in place, even in these extreme shooting conditions. One example is Ben Nye's Liquid Set, which can also be mixed with non-waterproof makeup to give it some staying power. Commercial waterproof makeup can also be used, but I always feel more secure with some wet set product on top. These products are available from local theatrical supply stores or online.

We have had mermaids with all sorts of looks, but I should tell you that people seem to be most consistently drawn to the mermaids with long hair: either clouds of curls suspended around them or long streaming ribbons creating gossamer shapes in the tank. But hair is just another thing that might not cooperate for the camera underwater. It tends to have a mind of its own. Practice, practice, practice, my long-haired beauties. If wigs are used, fasten them down tight. They come off in the water. Trust me.

It was a broiling hot day the first day I got in the tank myself. Though I was photographing the mermaids in the tank under cover of darkness (mysterious, no?), I was overheated and drenched in sweat by the end of that shoot. It seemed that getting in the tank would not only be a great way to cool off, but that I really *should* understand firsthand what the experience was like and what the demands were, seeing as I was asking some terrestrial maids to work underwater. If you are not a real mermaid it is *hard* to play at being one and make everything pretty for the camera and its endless technical demands. Keep your eyes open! Don't puff out your cheeks! Stay in the middle of the window! Don't let the hair cover your face! Make the tail pretty! But it is quite magical, even so. I think every mermaid I have photographed has been exhausted by the end of her shoot, but loathe to get out of the tank. I'd love to get in the tank again myself!

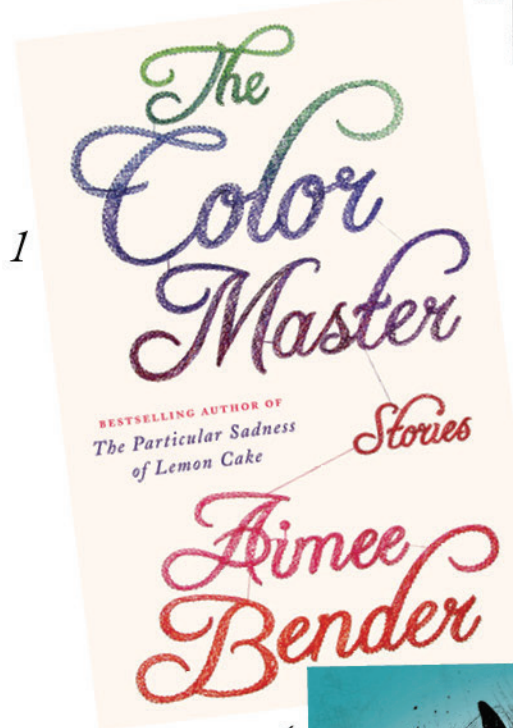
Annaliese Moyer Tassano is a photographer, traveller, horseman, theater artist, cook, classics and folklore fiend, yogi, and seeker. Find out more at Stagerightphoto.com.

ALL PHOTOS ©ANNALIESE MOYER TASSANO



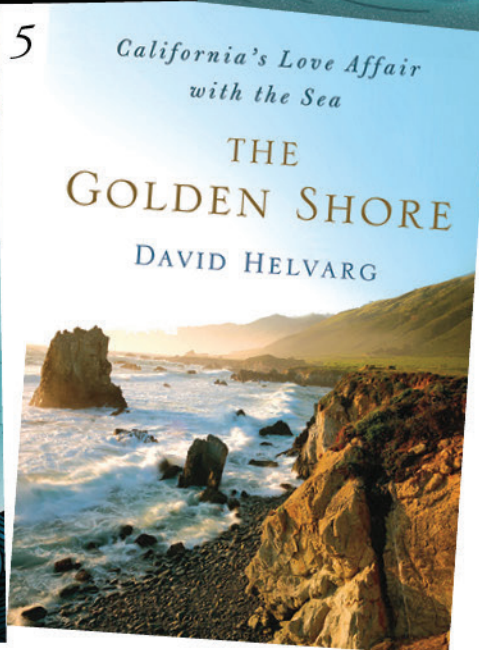
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1 THE COLOR MASTER: STORIES

is about people searching for connection through love, sex, and family—while navigating the often painful realities of their lives. Beloved by readers and critics alike, Aimee Bender has become known as an enchantress whose lush prose is “moving, fanciful, and gorgeously strange” (*People*), “richly imagined and bittersweet” (*Vanity Fair*), and “full of provocative ideas” (*The Boston Globe*). Aimeebender.com.

2 THE MUSEUM OF EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

From the beloved, bestselling author of *The Dovekeepers* comes a mesmerizing new novel about the electric and impassioned love between two vastly different souls in New York during the volatile first decades of the twentieth century: a striking Russian photographer, and a young woman who performs as a mermaid alongside performers like the Wolfman, the Butterfly Girl, and a 100-year-old turtle at her father’s Coney Island boardwalk freak show. Alicehoffman.com.

3 THE SWAN GONDOLA

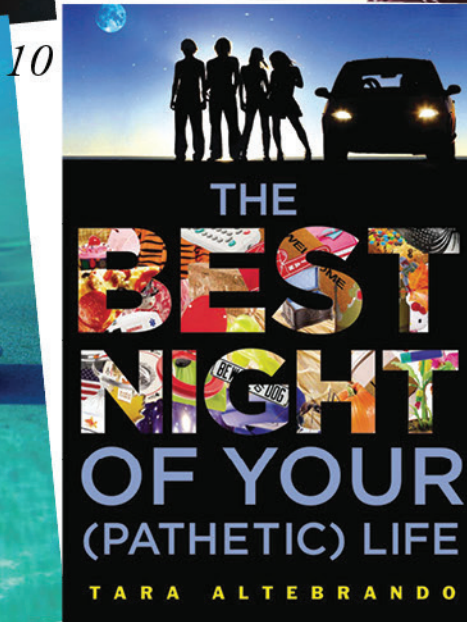
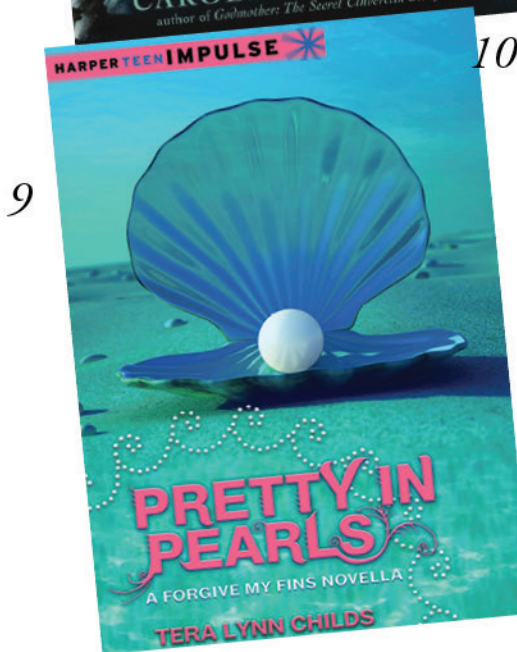
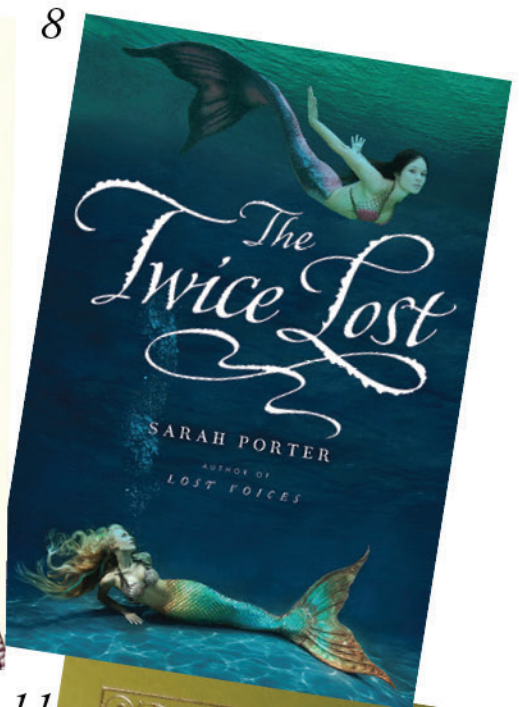
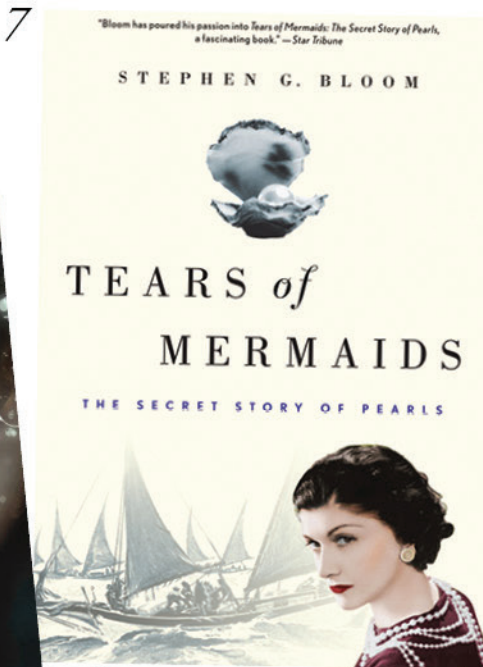
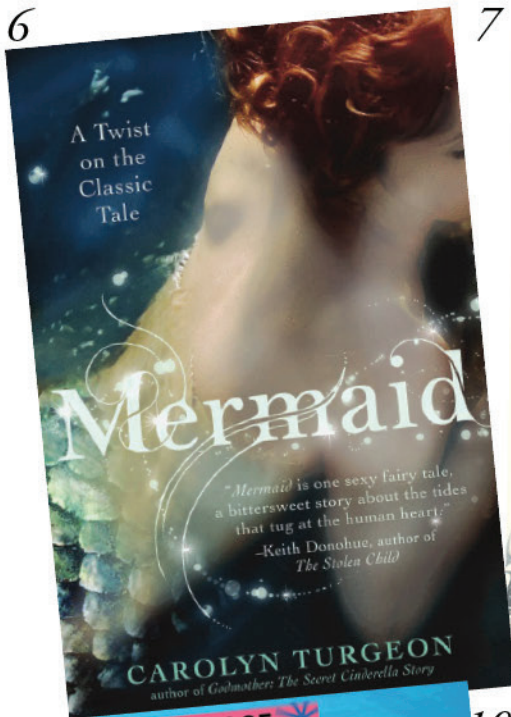
is a lush and thrilling romantic fable about two lovers set against the scandalous burlesques, midnight séances, and aerial ballets of the 1898 Omaha World’s Fair. “Every page of *The Swan Gondola* shimmers with exquisite detail ... Reading it, the magic of the day comes alive, complete with seers and balloons, with corsets and lipstick, love letters and the ventriloquism of romance.”—Emma Straub, author of *Laura Lamont’s Life in Pictures*. Timothyschaffert.com.

4 LOVE IN THE TIME OF GLOBAL WARMING

is a stunning reimagining of Homer’s *Odyssey* set in post-apocalyptic Los Angeles. In her signature style, Francesca Lia Block has created a world that is beautiful in its destruction and as frightening as it is lovely. At the helm is Pen, a strong heroine who holds hope and love in her hands and refuses to be defeated. Francescaliablock.com.

5 THE GOLDEN SHORE

tells the tale of the history, culture, and changing nature of California’s coasts and ocean. David Helvarg takes the reader on both a geographic and literary journey along the 1,100-mile Pacific coastline, from the Oregon border to the San Diego/Tijuana international border fence and out into its whale-, seal-, and shark-rich offshore seamounts, rock isles, and kelp forests. A *Booklist* Top Literary Travel Book of the Year. Bluefont.org.



6 MERMAID

Two sheltered princesses, one wounded warrior; who will live happily ever after? A surprising take on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, *Mermaid* is the story of the mermaid and her human rival—two women with everything to lose. Beautifully written and compulsively readable, it will make you think twice about the fairy tale you heard as a child, keeping you in suspense until the very last page. CarolynTurgeon.com.

7 TEARS OF MERMAIDS

In *Tears of Mermaids*, journalist Stephen G. Bloom travels 30,000 miles in an effort to trace a single pearl—from the moment a diver off the coast of Australia scoops an oyster containing a single luminescent pearl from the ocean floor to the instant a woman fastens the clasp of a strand containing the same orb. "A fascinating book."—*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

8 THE TWICE LOST

In *The Twice Lost*, the exciting final installment of Sarah Porter's *Lost Voices* trilogy, mermaid Luce swims to the San Francisco Bay, where she finds a group of renegade mermaids who unite to become an army under her leadership when war breaks out between humans and mermaids. Don't miss the thrilling conclusion to the saga that began with *Lost Voices* and *Waking Storms!* SarahPorterBooks.com.

9 PRETTY IN PEARLS

Undersea romance with captivating merboys, deep friendship, and spectacular pearls. Set in Tera Lynn Childs' fin-flicking world that began with *Forgive My Fins*, this 100-page digital novella focuses on Periwinkle Wentletrap, Princess Lily's best friend, who just might be falling head over fins for Riatius, the thoughtful pearl trader who looks like a dashing pirate. Teralynnchilds.com.

10 THE BEST NIGHT OF YOUR (PATHETIC) LIFE

follows four high school underdogs for a 12-hour period in which they're trying to win a very unofficial Senior Week Scavenger hunt. The prize? A garden yeti, of course! But also: GLORY! "A smart combination ... of poignancy and fun."—*Publishers Weekly*. Taraaltebrando.com.

11 THE AFFECTED PROVINCIAL'S COMPANION, VOLUME ONE

is a diverse and humorous collection of treatises, insightful essays, philosophical diagrams, saucy poetry, and other amusing trifles. Between the shimmering covers of this sleek and beguiling tome the reader will come across timeless subjects like the perils of sportswear, diaphanous self-defense for sissies, tramp aestheticism, the proper grooming of facial hair, and how to become a bon vivant. LordWhimsy.com.

SELKIES: THE OTHER WOMEN from the SEA

Morgan Grey

a fisherman discovers a group of beautiful women dancing nude on the shore. A pile of sealskins lies on the rocks nearby. He manages to snatch one before the women grab their skins in alarm and dash into the water—all except for the one, that is, whose skin the fisherman holds. The woman weeps and wails, but no matter how much she begs, he refuses to give it back. Without her sealskin, she cannot return to the sea, so she follows him home. They marry.

Years pass. The fisherman and his seal bride have a number of children. She's a good wife and mother, but she never stops yearning for the sea. One day, when the fisherman is away, one of the children discovers the skin, and the seal woman immediately recognizes it as her own. She puts it on and dives into the ocean, where she reunites with her seal husband. For many years after, she visits the shore to watch her human children from the water. Sometimes she leaves fish for them, but she never returns to land. Her human husband can do nothing but mourn.

This story of the selkie bride has long been widespread in lands settled by Vikings across the North Atlantic. Even into the last century there were families that claimed descent from seal women in Orkney, Shetland, the Hebrides, the west coast of Ireland, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland. A 2010 travel brochure for the Faroe Islands advertised tours to a village where the descendants of a seal woman still live.

In legend, these creatures, known variously as selkie folk, silkies, or selchies, were seals who could shed their skins on land to become human. There is no consensus about when this could occur: some stories said once a year, others once a month or only on St. John's Eve or only on the seventh stream (twice-annual periods of high tides).

Stories also differed on the origin of selkies. They might be angels fallen from heaven, or people who committed sins grievous enough to bar them from heaven but not enough to banish them to hell. In some stories they were said to be children of the King of Lochlann (Norway) who were bespelled by a jealous stepmother. In others, they were people who had drowned.





MICHAEL WM. KALUTA'S MERMAIDS

Legendary comic book artist Michael Wm. Kaluta lives in a beautiful, jam-packed New York City apartment filled to the brim with wonders. There are books from floor to ceiling, and he invariably opens to pages you can just fall into—old storybooks and fairy tale collections with ladies draped around the first letter of every chapter, crumbling books you’ve never heard of with passages he’ll read to you that will break your heart wide open. And then there are his own colorful images—his otherwise-unused kitchen cabinets host a display of his Tolkien art and his large watercolors beckon the eye wherever the shelves allow. In the main room is one of his famous mermaids, her long long tail swooping down and weirdly, wonderfully, turning into the feathers of a peacock ...

Kaluta began drawing mermaids back in art school in the 1960s, and they've been a part of his vision ever since. He began a career in comics in the 1970s, working with D.C. and Marvel, and was one of the noted members of "The Studio," which included fantasy artists Jeff Jones, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Bernie Wrightson. He worked with Elaine Lee on the space opera *Starstruck*, and was involved in the original stage version. He's done covers for Danzig, worked on video games, illustrated numerous books, and done countless private commissions—all in his detailed, elegant, art-nouveau-influenced, ultra-romantic style.

Carolyn Turgeon sat down with him recently to talk about one of his favorite subjects.

What is it about mermaids that you find so alluring?

Part of the allure of mermaids has to be their sinuous physicality, embodying in their shape the mysterious artful movement of women, combined with the mermaid's unavailability. I'm not attracted by the "tempting sailors to their deaths" part of their brief. I know I could never swim to their rocky island havens ... but seeing them out of reach, having them offer charms and graces and the heavy suggestion of physical intimacy while my nature forces me to only observe ... observe and fantasize: that makes for a very strong attraction point, embracing their mythos, not their promises.

The sea has always frightened me in a thrilling, never-ending way; I'm drawn to it but very cautious of edging too close. The sea has that permeable, ever-changing but eternal surface under which anything can be right at your feet without you ever having an inkling. There's a Robert E. Howard line from his novel *Almuric*: "My mind peopled the distance with nightmare shapes." That sums up my take on The Sea as metaphor for What Lies Beneath, The Unconscious, The Hidden, the "PLEASE Don't Jump Up Out Of The Ocean And Eat Me" frame of respect. Adding mermaids to the sea allows me to understand and accept its awesomeness vicariously. Mermaids are very at home in the sea ... what mysteries it has for them aren't things that I'd ever have to come to grips with. My fears are their commonplaces. Letting myself identify with a near-human creature that is accustomed to the deeps and shallows allows me safe access to that wonderland. Once safely underwater, I can begin to shape their realities and my fears into strong, evocative imagery—something another land-bound individual can respond to without getting wet.

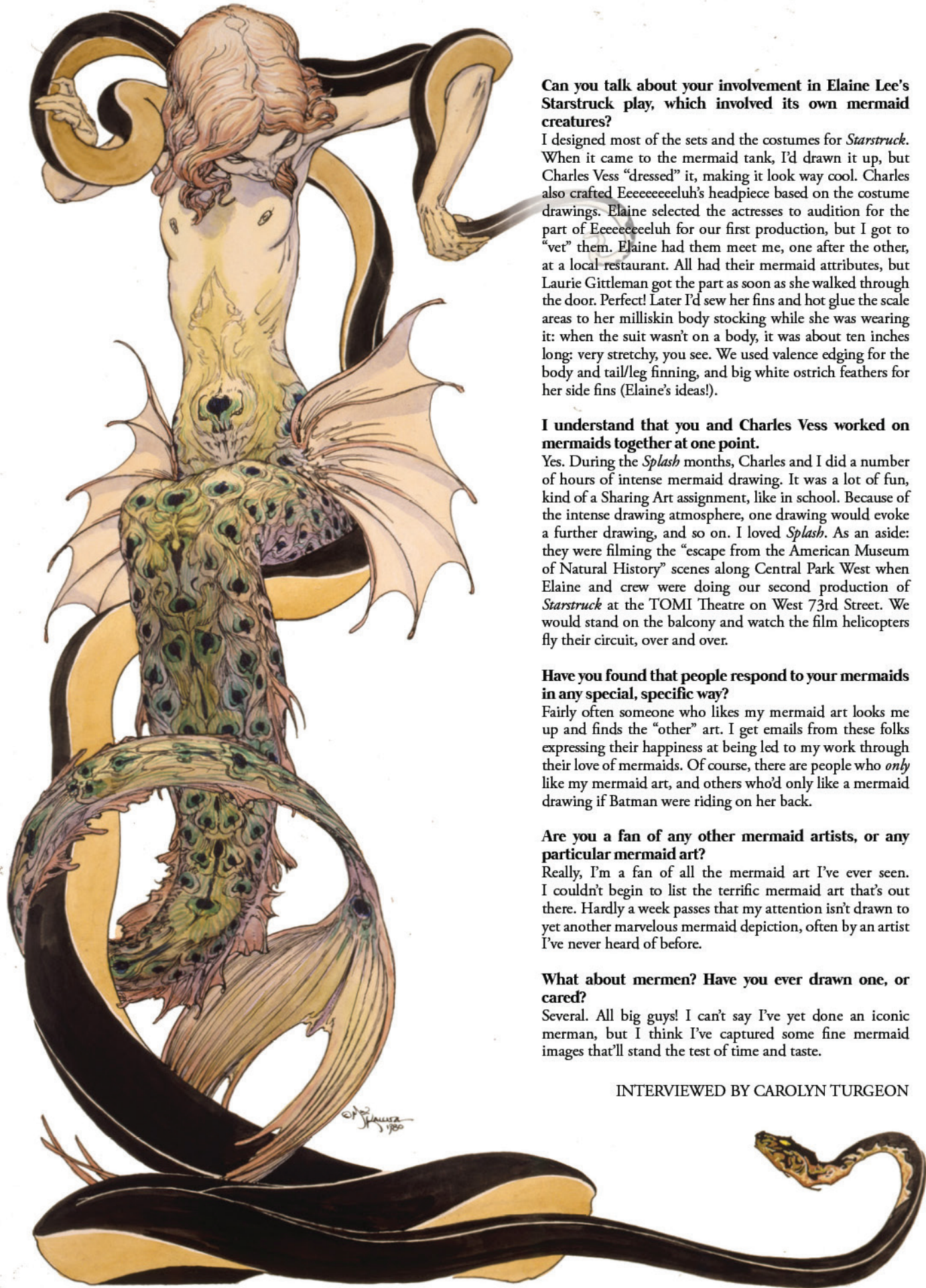
What is it that you like about drawing/painting them?

I feel I do my best work when I rely on a visceral reaction to the shapes the individual elements take on, and mermaids, having such a terrifically evocative shape in themselves, propel me well on my way to a good composition without me having to work from the blank page. The content of a piece, its "why," increases dramatically when the shape of a mermaid is present. Because they live inside people's minds, bringing a mermaid into a picture also brings their hidden associations into the art.

Over the years, as I learned more about human anatomy and studied fauna, the better I could imagine mermaids. I can remember the day I woke up from the common illusion of mermaids being women with tails to the idea that mermaids had the FORM of women but were creatures in their own right. That was the day I began to pay attention to their gills.

Eventually gills became quite a strong part of the design element. From my early days of happy, zaftig mermaids to my days of webbed, gilled, and seaweed-haired ocean dwellers was a series of epiphanies, each one more Ah-HA than the previous. I started going to books about fish for mermaid reference as opposed to photo collections of beautiful women. And eventually there were more fins in more places and The Sea took over from Fairy Tale.





Can you talk about your involvement in Elaine Lee's *Starstruck* play, which involved its own mermaid creatures?

I designed most of the sets and the costumes for *Starstruck*. When it came to the mermaid tank, I'd drawn it up, but Charles Vess "dressed" it, making it look way cool. Charles also crafted Eeeeeeeeluh's headpiece based on the costume drawings. Elaine selected the actresses to audition for the part of Eeeeeeeeluh for our first production, but I got to "vet" them. Elaine had them meet me, one after the other, at a local restaurant. All had their mermaid attributes, but Laurie Gittleman got the part as soon as she walked through the door. Perfect! Later I'd sew her fins and hot glue the scale areas to her milliskin body stocking while she was wearing it: when the suit wasn't on a body, it was about ten inches long: very stretchy, you see. We used valence edging for the body and tail/leg finning, and big white ostrich feathers for her side fins (Elaine's ideas!).

I understand that you and Charles Vess worked on mermaids together at one point.

Yes. During the *Splash* months, Charles and I did a number of hours of intense mermaid drawing. It was a lot of fun, kind of a Sharing Art assignment, like in school. Because of the intense drawing atmosphere, one drawing would evoke a further drawing, and so on. I loved *Splash*. As an aside: they were filming the "escape from the American Museum of Natural History" scenes along Central Park West when Elaine and crew were doing our second production of *Starstruck* at the TOMI Theatre on West 73rd Street. We would stand on the balcony and watch the film helicopters fly their circuit, over and over.

Have you found that people respond to your mermaids in any special, specific way?

Fairly often someone who likes my mermaid art looks me up and finds the "other" art. I get emails from these folks expressing their happiness at being led to my work through their love of mermaids. Of course, there are people who *only* like my mermaid art, and others who'd only like a mermaid drawing if Batman were riding on her back.

Are you a fan of any other mermaid artists, or any particular mermaid art?

Really, I'm a fan of all the mermaid art I've ever seen. I couldn't begin to list the terrific mermaid art that's out there. Hardly a week passes that my attention isn't drawn to yet another marvelous mermaid depiction, often by an artist I've never heard of before.

What about mermen? Have you ever drawn one, or cared?

Several. All big guys! I can't say I've yet done an iconic merman, but I think I've captured some fine mermaid images that'll stand the test of time and taste.

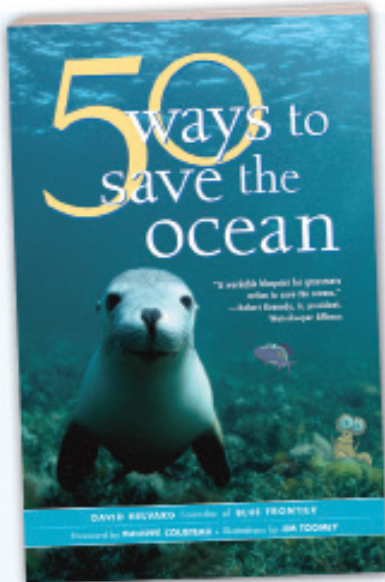
INTERVIEWED BY CAROLYN TURGEON



"I call upon all Americans to learn more about the oceans and what can be done to conserve them."

—President Barack Obama

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Fiction | *Caitlin R. Kiernan*

**THE MERMAID OF THE
CONCRETE OCEAN**

Caitlin R. Kiernan

all my life I've been fascinated with the sea, and with mermaids, sirens, naiads, river nymphs, etc. When I began my novel *The Drowning Girl*, one of the things that worked its way into the story was the subject of mermaids. But also the subject of werewolves.

And so it became a story about transformation, told from the perspective of a young schizophrenic woman. There are two short stories within the novel "written by" the protagonist, and this excerpt is one of them, from a story called "The Mermaid of the Concrete Ocean." The novel is also very concerned with paintings (the book's title refers to a fictional painting), one of which is described in this excerpt.

I'd been familiar with Kyle Cassidy's photography for some time, as he's worked with friends of mine, such as Neil Gaiman and Elizabeth Bear. The photo to the left came out of a cool collaboration for the book. We were doing a photoshoot one day at the Harvard Museum of Natural History, because I needed a new author photo, and he asked to read the manuscript of *The Drowning Girl*. I sent it to him, he loved it, and we started talking about visual projects that would tie in with the book, help promote it, and be wonderful art in their own right. He worked out a series of still photographs, and we found a videographer to shoot a "trailer" for the book. We found three models/actresses, and everything began falling into place. I love his work, and I think the results were something marvelous and provided an extra dimension to the book. I'd add that Sarah Murphy, who played our "mermaid," was a real trooper. The photo here was taken in a freezing swimming pool, and she did many other shots for us in cold water.

An Excerpt from

THE DROWNING GIRL

"It's beautiful," I say, and that isn't idle flattery. The mermaid paintings are the reason that I've come to New York City and tracked her to the tawdry little hovel by the river. This isn't the first time I've seen an original up close, but it is the first time outside a museum gallery. There's one hanging in Newport, at the National Museum of American Illustration. I've seen it, and also the one at the Academy of Art in Chicago, and one other, the mermaid in the permanent collection of the Society of Illustrators here in Manhattan. But there are more than 30 documented, and most of them I've only seen reproduced in books and folios. Frankly, I wonder if this painting's existence is very widely known, and how long it's been since anyone but the model, sitting here in her wheelchair, has admired it. I've read all the artist's surviving journals and correspondence (including the letters to his model), and I know that there are at least ten mermaid paintings that remain unaccounted for. I assume this must be one of them.

"Wow," I gasp, unable to look away from the painting. "I mean, it's amazing."

"It's the very last one he did, you know," she says. "He wanted me to have it. If someone offered me a million dollars, I still wouldn't part with it."

I glance at her, then back to the painting. "More likely, they'd offer you ten million," I tell her, and she laughs. It might easily be mistaken for the laugh of a much younger woman.

"Wouldn't make any difference if they did," she says. "He gave it to me, and I'll never part with it. Not ever. He named this one *Regarding the Shore from Whale Reef*, and that was my idea, the title. He often asked me to name them. At least half their titles, I thought up for him." And I already know this; it's in his letters.

The painting occupies a large, narrow canvas, easily four feet tall by two feet wide—somewhat too large for this wall, really—held inside an ornately carved frame. The frame has been stained dark as mahogany, though I'm sure it's something far less precious; here and there, where the varnish has been scratched or chipped, I can see the blonde wood showing through. But I don't doubt that the painting is authentic, despite numerous compositional deviations, all of which are immediately apparent to anyone familiar with the mermaid series. For instance, in contravention to his usual approach, the siren has been placed in the foreground, and also somewhat to the right. And, more importantly, she's facing away from the viewer. Buoyed by rough waves, she holds her arms outstretched to either side, her long hair floating around her like a dense tangle of kelp, and the mermaid gazes toward land and a whitewashed lighthouse perched on a granite promontory. The rocky coastline is familiar, some wild place he'd found in Massachusetts or Maine or Rhode Island. The viewer might be fooled into thinking this is only a painting of a woman swimming in the sea, as so little of her is showing above the waterline. She might be mistaken for a suicide, taking a final glimpse of the rugged strand before slipping below the surface. But, if one looks only a little closer, the patches of red-orange scales flecking her arms are unmistakable, and there are living creatures caught up in the snarls of her black hair: tiny crabs and brittle stars, the twisting shapes of strange oceanic worms and a gasping, wide-eyed fish of some sort, suffocating in the air.

Caitlin R. Kiernan is the author of many science fiction and dark fantasy works, including nine novels, many comic books, more than a hundred published short stories, novellas, and vignettes, and numerous scientific papers. Visit CaitlinRKiernan.com.



SIPPING WITH SIRENS

Jill Gleeson



ILLUSTRATION BY DIVE BAR MERMAID RACHEL SMITH

Inside this swanky slice of a saloon in central California something magical is happening. Within a massive tank hanging suspended above the long, sleek bar, a mermaid is gliding gracefully through the water, which is lit a seductive sapphire blue. Alongside her in the aquarium are the remains, it seems, of a shipwreck; a roulette wheel can be glimpsed, along with a piano, and bottles of liquor, too—all looking like they’ve been submerged for decades. Festively colored fish swim to and fro, as if they might be following the mermaid’s flowing, golden tresses.

Welcome to Dive Bar, downtown Sacramento’s hippest watering hole. The brainchild of husband and wife team George and Lynda Karpaty, Dive Bar opened in January of 2011 to packed crowds who show no signs of moving on. There are now six mermaid performers, as well as two mermen, swimming weekly for the delight of the bar’s patrons.

Head mermaid Rachel Smith describes a typical night at work: “Every night is a different experience at Dive; you never know what the crowd’s energy is going to be, if the fish are feeling frisky, what live music is going to be playing. It’s seriously a blast! We flirt with bar patrons, blow kisses, search for sunken treasure, comb our hair and primp in a mirror, write messages, ‘drink’ beer, do barrel rolls, flips, and bubble rings, and generally have a lot of fun.”

Enthuses Lynda Karpaty, “You can’t believe all the people that email us and call us and say they want to be a mermaid at Dive Bar! But it’s an extremely difficult job. It’s saltwater, and it can be very cold, so our mermaids can’t be in the tank for more than 25 minutes at a time. They have to shower carefully before they get in, too, to take off all the body oils because it could hurt the fish. And then they have to apply theatrical makeup. It’s tough.”

Rachel adds, “There’s a lot more to being a mermaid than rolling on a tail. It



©JILL GLEESON

takes our new mermaids three months at the very least before they are acceptable performers. The grace, strength, and expression aren't always instinctual. It's a whole new world down there!"

Tough, too, was putting together everything needed to bring Dive Bar's mermaids to life. When George Karpaty handed the reins of the project over to his wife in 2010, she wasn't sure where to begin. She put feelers out into the entertainment community in San Francisco as well as UC Davis's swim team, but no recruits stepped forward. Finally, after placing an ad in the alternative paper the *Sacramento News and Review*, Lynda hit pay dirt. Besieged with inquiries, she soon had her mermaids.

Next up, Lynda contacted Eric "The Mertailor" Ducharme in Florida to craft the mermaids' most important feature: their tails. "I was extremely excited to have the opportunity to be a part of something so unique," Eric says. At first he and Lynda discussed fabric tails, until he showed her his super-realistic silicone designs. "Dive Bar has some of my first silicone tails," he says, "which I have recently improved. Now the mermaids sport my newest silicone designs."

With her mermaids and their tails in place, and Dive Bar's opening fast approaching, Lynda still had no idea what, exactly, her mermaids should do once they got into the tank. Then, fate intervened. Home alone one evening, Lynda caught an episode of *20/20* that delved into the wonderful world of mermaids. Featured on the segment was famed California-based performer Linden Wolbert. Lynda reached out to her

and before long Wolbert was in Sacramento, where she worked with Dive Bar's team for two full days.

Although Wolbert says she generally doesn't "train mers," she jumped at what she calls "a really unique and fun opportunity. The guys and gals of Dive Bar were a blast to work with. They have an awesome opportunity to get all mythical ... in the middle of a metropolitan area! The space is really unique and beautiful. I really just helped them find their inner mers. Relax in the water. Be comfortable in a tail and learn to be one with it. Open your eyes and make it look like you're not underwater when you smile and interact with the audience."

And interact with the audience they do. Among the most charming bits of mer-business: holding up a tiny chalk board reading "Hi Dive Bar!"; miming drinking a cocktail from one of the glasses in the aquarium; posing winsomely for photos; and spinning the roulette wheel. It's all absolutely fun and utterly fascinating—and no doubt a big reason patrons keep returning in droves. In fact the concept has been such a success, the Karpats plan on opening other locations around the country. With just a little mermaid magic, they might be splashing to a city near you.

When she's not at her computer, independent journalist Jill Gleeson tirelessly roams the globe in search of oddball adventures she can't tell her mother about. Gopinkboots.com.

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FLORIDA'S LEGENDARY MERMAID ATTRACTION

in the mid-1940s, Newt Perry looked at the clear waters of Weeki Wachee Spring just north of Tampa, Florida, and saw a roadside attraction where beautiful mermaids would woo travelers off Route 19 and entertain them by performing feats underwater. Weeki Wachee Springs opened in 1947 and featured an underwater theater built into the limestone of the spring. Newt hired a local troupe of synchronized swimmers to be his first mermaids, who ate bananas and drank soda pop while posing and swimming fetchingly underwater, and eventually girls would come from all over to land a coveted job as a Weeki Wachee mermaid.

In 1960 ABC Paramount took over, building a larger theater and initiating a whole era of choreographed, scripted shows, like *Alice in Waterland* and *Mermaids on the Moon*. Back in the day, Weeki Wachee was enormously glamorous and popular, and attracted stars like Elvis Presley and Esther Williams. It inspired several more midcentury mermaid attractions, like Aquarama in Osage Beach, Missouri, Aquarena Springs in San Marcos, Texas (which also featured a diving pig), and a host of “porthole” bars like Fort Lauderdale’s Wreck Bar, which was made famous in movies like *Where the Boys Are*. There, thanks to Marina MeduSirena and her pod, patrons can still watch mermaids swimming behind porthole windows (which look out onto a swimming pool) at the bar.

These were all places where women became, and in some cases

still become, real-life mermaids, with all the glamour and wildness and freedom that folktale mermaids represent—and have always represented, throughout the ages.

In 1997 Weeki celebrated its 50th anniversary with a huge mermaid reunion and a special show featuring a small group of former mermaids. The show was so popular that it eventually became a regular feature at the park. Today, in addition to seeing daily shows starring the current crop of mermaids, visitors can see monthly shows starring the “formers”—a group of former Weeki Wachee mermaids now in their 50s, 60s and 70s. “We still awe people with our underwater talents,” says Vicki Smith, who swam for Elvis when he visited the park in 1961. “Not much youth and beauty in our shows, but a whole lot of heart and history!”

These fabulous mermaids also run the two-day Sirens of the Deep mermaid camps for adult women, which started in 2010 at former mermaid Barbara Wynns’ urging. Every summer, women from all over can come to the park, put on a tail, and learn to swim in the famed underwater theater while their friends and family take photos. In one 2011 camp, a wild manatee even swam into the spring and joined the ladies for the day. “There are a lot of landlocked mer-spirits out there,” Barbara says. “And when they do experience water, or connections to like souls, it’s like remembering a best friend from long ago.”



©ANDREW BRUSSO

“ These were all the places where women became, and in some cases still become, real-life mermaids. ”



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Painting Mermaids

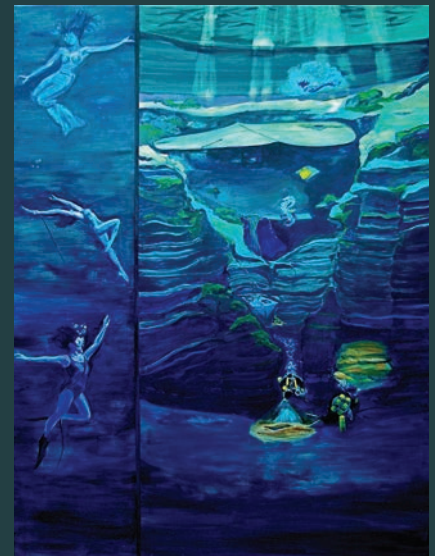
As *Weeki's* artist-in-residence, Julie Komenda has a growing body of work devoted to the mermaids at *Weeki Wachee*. She's painted many of the current and former mermaids as well as the park's famous deep hole (see below)—the well head of the natural spring, located right under the mermaid theater. “*Weeki Wachee* mermaids have a grace about them,” she says. “They're the water muses to me. I've taken photographs of them underwater where they look like they could be on dry land, that's how comfortable they are in the spring.”

Julie first came to *Weeki* to interview the former mermaids, but after Barbara Wynns and Vicki Smith invited her to swim in that crystal-clear water, she was hooked. “It was life-changing,” she says. “Floating over that bottomless, mermaid-filled natural wonder made me want to capture that moment forever!”

“Imagine: I was numb from the cold, floating, attached to a safety device, tired, breathless, and exhilarated at the same time! Down below me mermaids and scuba divers were zipping by the stage of the mermaid theater, and below them was the mysterious deep. I felt like I was flying!”

Julie herself slipped on a tail and attended the *Sirens of the Deep* mermaid camp in its first year, and since then has become the camp's resident photographer, documenting over 200 mermaid transformations—of women young and old who dream of flying through water. “It's an honor to photograph women as they are empowered physically, emotionally, and spiritually,” she says.

“The sisterhood is pretty magical stuff, and I'm the luckiest person in the world.”



BACKSTAGE PASS BY JULIE KOMENDA



Jill Gleeson

DENVER'S MYSTIC MERMAIDS

©MIKE GOODELL

they perch gracefully on the edge of the stingray pool in Denver's Downtown Aquarium, tails spread out below them, smiling and posing for photos with their many admirers. Hair still damp from their beautifully choreographed underwater show, Cora and Kaya are some of the Mile High City's most exotic stars, two fetching mermaids who arrived at the aquarium just over three years ago, intent on teaching young and old alike how to care for the earth's oceans. And according to Allison Wos, the show's most senior mermaid and herself a performer, the public is responding. Aquarium revenues are up, and on a good day crowds of 200 may pack the gallery where the shows are held.

Wos was there from the beginning, when former mermaid Desaray Palinckx rounded up six of her friends to put on a show. Together they perused the blogs and the videos of professional mermaids, teaching themselves how to swim with tails and move gracefully—and safely—underwater. Palinckx created the two characters who, through voiceover, speak to the audience, stressing the importance of recycling and keeping trash out of the ocean. The shows feature the mermaids swimming in saltwater alongside such magical creatures as sea turtles, stingrays, nurse sharks, and moray eels. "It's an amazing opportunity," Wos says. "I'm very fortunate to call sea turtles and eels my co-workers!"

There are now 15 performers who portray the two mermaids, both in shows and the aquarium's monthly "Under the Sea" breakfast, where fans can get autographs and their pictures taken with Cora and Kaya. As the popularity of this utterly unique attraction expands

(the Downtown Aquarium was the first in the country to have its own mermaids), the aquarium is ever on the lookout for new sea sirens. While water skills are a must, so too are the ability to stay in character—and to interact well with the flocks of starry-eyed, mermaid-loving children who always seem to ask the darnedest questions.

"Kids ask you things out of the blue, and you have to decide, on the spot, what the right answer is," Wos explains. "I remember one little boy came up to me—he was very shy, it took him a little while—but he finally asked me, 'How did they catch you?' And I thought for a minute and I told him, 'We ran into some aquarium divers in the ocean. And they asked us to come back with them to teach children about recycling and how to take care of the ocean.' You've got to think on your toes!"

But by far the most common query the Mystic Mermaids field comes from little girls who ask "How do I get my tail?" Wos calls it "the hardest question to answer, because you don't want to create this idea that they can literally become a mermaid." Instead she instructs them to become protectors of the seas, like her. "By taking care of the oceans and the animals that live in them, and by teaching other people how to do the same—that's our idea of how to teach little girls to become mermaids," she muses. "We tell them to protect the oceans and 'as you get older, you'll discover you're your own mermaid.'"

The Mystic Mermaids perform several times a day at Denver's Downtown Aquarium. For more information on these shows, or to make a reservation for the "Under the Sea" breakfast, visit Aquariumrestaurants.com.

©TODD ESSICK



MeduSirena is a pop culture historian and fire-eating aquatic entertainer intent on bringing back old-style aquatic entertainment—or retro-tainment—to the world at large. She performs internationally, including at the ongoing virtual aquarium in Macau, China, and the legendary Wreck Bar in Fort Lauderdale, where she trains and appears with her pod of “aquaticats.” Medusirena.com.

DESTINATION SNAPSHOTS

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The Wreck Bar

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Every Friday at 6:30 PM, patrons pack this small, historic bar to see Marina MeduSirena and her pod of “aquaticats” gliding gracefully past the bar windows, smiling and blowing kisses at the crowd as they perform aquatic dances and acrobatics in the pool outside. Located in the old Yankee Clipper Hotel, which was built in 1956 in the shape of a large ship (and is now the Sheraton Fort Lauderdale Beach Hotel), the Wreck Bar has been featured in movies like *Where the Boys Are* and *Analyze This* and hearkens back to a time when aquatic attractions were all the rage. The hotel was the “it” place to visit when it opened, and attracted glittery patrons like Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe, who were frequent visitors and even carved their names on the bar itself. The old shows stopped in 1962; Marina MeduSirena regenerated interest in the bar when she revived the retro-aquatic shows in 2006, in an effort to renew interest in underwater entertainment. After the “MeduSirena Underwater Swimshow,” guests are welcome to talk and take pictures with MeduSirena and her posse poolside. The bar also features a bright blue “Marina the Fire-Eating Mermaid” cocktail, complete with a cherry and an orange twist.

Coney Island Mermaid Parade

Coney Island, New York

Every summer since 1983, on the third Saturday in June, throngs of New Yorkers dress up in their finest mermaid garb and take to the streets of Coney Island to march in the Coney Island Mermaid Parade, which has surpassed the 4th of July as the number one business day and attendance day during the entire Coney Island season. There are usually a few thousand participants, and hundreds of thousands more watching—old, young, and everywhere in between, despite the often risqué outfits (or lack thereof) of the participants. Founder Dick Zigun, who has himself marched in the parade every year come rain or come shine, says he was inspired by turn-of-the-century Mardi Gras parades in Coney Island and Atlantic City, where mermaid costumes were popular. Every year a King Neptune and Queen Mermaid are featured; past kings and queens have included celebrities like Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, David Byrne, Queen Latifah, and Harvey Keitel. The parade is put on by the small non-profit Coney Island USA, which also produces the Coney Island Circus Sideshow, the Coney Island Museum, Burlesque at the Beach, and the Coney Island Tattoo and Motorcycle Festival.

Sip ‘n Dip Lounge

Great Falls, Montana

The Sip ‘n Dip Lounge is a classic tiki bar that features mermaids every Wednesday through Saturday night, swimming in an outdoor pool and visible to guests through the bar windows. Though the bar itself has been around since the ‘60s, it wasn’t until New Year’s Eve 1994 that its first mermaid showed up, after owners Sandra Thares and mother Jan Johnson joked that it’d be funny to have a mermaid appear for the holiday. They rounded up one of the housekeepers, duct-taped a green tablecloth to her legs, and a tradition was born. Now there are five mermaids on staff and Sandy sews all the mermaid tails herself. In 2003 *GQ Magazine* named this place the number one bar on earth worth flying for, and Daryl Hannah has even shown up, shimmied into a tail, and taken a dip in the pool. Mermaids wear goggles to see and interact with audience members, blowing them kisses and occasionally challenging them to games of rock paper scissors. The lounge also features the talents of “Piano Pat” Sponheim, not to mention the ever-popular 64-ounce nine-shot fish bowl cocktail, which comes in an actual fish bowl and is concocted from a top-secret mermaid recipe.



Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen's famous Little Mermaid statue was unveiled in 1913, a gift to the city from brewer Carl Jacobsen, who commissioned it from sculptor Edvard Eriksen after becoming fascinated by a *Little Mermaid* ballet at Copenhagen's Royal Theatre. *The Little Mermaid* was, of course, one of the most famous tales of Hans Christian Andersen, who spent much of his life in Denmark's capital city. In 2010, the famous statue (and Copenhagen's most visited attraction) was moved for the first time from Copenhagen's Langelinie to Shanghai, where it was displayed at the Danish Pavilion for the duration of Expo 2010. A replacement statue was placed in the city's Tivoli Gardens, one of the world's oldest amusement parks that's also home to The Flying Trunk, a ride depicting 32 scenes from Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. Visitors to Copenhagen can also visit The Wonderful World of Hans Christian Andersen—full of tableaux from his tales, including the little mermaid staring up at the faraway prince—as well as the famous statue of the writer outside of City Hall, several of his former residences, and his grave at Assistens Cemetery. A 90-minute train ride away is Hans's quaint hometown of Odense, where visitors can find more statues, more former residences, and the excellent Hans Christian Andersen Museum, which contains, among many other treasures, the original manuscript of *The Little Mermaid*.

Silverton Hotel and Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada

Visitors to Las Vegas's Silverton Hotel and Casino are greeted by a 117,000-gallon saltwater aquarium containing 4,000 tropical fish, including stingrays and sharks, and—every Thursday through Sunday throughout the day and evening—live mermaids. The Mermaid Lounge right next to it features two 500-gallon jellyfish aquariums, while behind it painter Will Cormier sells mermaid art. In 2007 a couple got married inside the aquarium (as many have done at Weeki Wachee Springs) and that same year illusionist Criss Angel made a Houdini-style underwater escape while chained and confined in a locked box. In August 2011 the Silverton was home to the first annual Mermaid Convention and World Mermaid Awards, with Hannah Fraser, MeduSirena, and others performing in the outdoor pool while dozens of mermaids and mermen sat along the pool's edges, their tails resting in the water.



Warsaw, Poland

A double-tailed warrior mermaid, armed with a sword and shield, has been the symbol of Warsaw since the fourteenth century. Visitors today can see the mermaid in Warsaw's coat of arms, in the "Fall in Love with Warsaw" posters scattered through the city, and in famous statues like the "Syrenka" in the very center of Old Town square (actually a cast of the Konstancy Hege original, made in 1855) or the massive "Syrena" on the bank of the Vistula River. The latter was created in 1939 by Louise Nitschowa and was one of the few city monuments not destroyed during the war by the Nazis, who didn't realize the mermaid's role as protectress of the city. According to one legend, the mermaid's been ready to come to the city's aid ever since a young fisherman and his friends saved her from a merchant who'd trapped her and imprisoned her in a wooden hut after hearing her sing. Other legends associate Poseidon's son Triton with the city. However she came to Warsaw originally, the mermaid is ever-present there now: she can also be seen on almost all Warsaw municipal buildings, trams, buses, taxis, and lampposts.

Norfolk, Virginia

Since the spring of 2000, which saw the debut of the Mermaids on Parade arts campaign, this southern city has been home to dozens of themed mermaid sculptures scattered alluringly throughout town—in bank lobbies and shopping centers and schools, on the sides of buildings, and on street corners. It was Norfolk attorney Pete Decker who introduced the idea in 1999, after his wife saw the effectiveness of Chicago's Cows on Parade campaign in promoting civic pride and generating tourism, and after Norfolk had adopted the mermaid as its city logo in celebration of its nautical heritage. Businesses have been able to "adopt" mermaids at \$2,000 apiece, with proceeds going to the Commission on the Arts and Humanities and arts organizations and charities. Mermaid Gabrielle "Ellie" Elaina English was recently named the official mermaid of Norfolk. "They are very protective of their mermaid image," Ellie says, "so I'm very grateful and honored that I get to unveil statues and appear at museums, hospitals, and on TV occasionally ... I am just glad to be a part of it."

Kiryat Yam, Israel

In 2009 this northern Israeli town made world news when its mayor offered a \$1 million reward to anyone who could provide evidence of an actual mermaid swimming in its bay. The reward came about after some local fishermen claimed to have seen the mermaid, who is part of local legend, and then showed up at City Hall to report it. After the reward was announced, tourists and media flocked to the town with cameras and binoculars; NBC did a special featuring underwater footage, and more recently Animal Planet aired "Mermaid Sighting in Kiryat Yam" in its *Mermaids: The New Evidence*. There's a mermaid statue on the beach now, and visitors can buy t-shirts featuring a road sign warning from the mermaid. To this day no one's been able to prove the mermaid's existence, and the offer of the reward still stands. As Kiryat Yam spokesman Naty Key Zilberman says, "All of us like to dream about fairy tales, and it's always nice to believe that maybe there's some creature from the fairy tale nearby. Until we have solid evidence that there is *not* a mermaid, we can still believe."

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Raina the Halifax Mermaid (aka Stephanie) is an artist and teacher who's been inspired by mermaids since she was a young child. She appears as a mermaid in local schools, educating students on ocean conservation. "Everything comes back to the ocean," she says. "People need to understand that cycle and respect the balance. It's easy to ignore an ad on TV or a sign on the street ... it's not easy to ignore a beautiful mermaid begging you to take care of her home!" Visit Raina online at Halifaxmermaids.com.

©SEAN NORMAN

Tara Altebrando **THE WORLD
BY ITS TAIL**

In our living room, with its curtains so very seersucker and its tight rug so speckled like birds' eggs—all of it so dry—it's hard to remember that I used to be a mermaid. And harder still to accept that Luna will probably never have the chance to be one. She'll never know the way it feels to be adored like that, to be that kind of *free*. She'll never see fish up close—so close you can see their gills pulse and see a million shades of orange or gold—unless she learns to snorkel or scuba dive, but oh, all that gear!

Who could stand it?

So we pretend.

Right now she is lying on our big blue beanbag chair and I am wrapping a sea-green sheet around her legs—snug but not too tight—so that she can sit and close her eyes and imagine the bean bag is a sea shell—big and pink and open—her favorite place to lounge and watch the ocean go by.

I tuck the sheet in at her waist and tie it around her ankles loosely with a shimmering blue ribbon, then wrap my own legs up, too, with a golden sarong. I lie down on the floor in front of her and start to sing, "*We're not like other women/We don't have to clean an oven.*"

I'm fanning myself with a folding fan made of delicate floral

paper folded on skinny wood, and she's giggling and fanning herself with an imaginary fan similar to mine.

"*And we nev-er will grow old ...*" I sing. "*We've got the world by the tail!*"

Luna gets up then, as I hum a few more bars of the song that haunts me even now—all these years later—and she shuffles to the kitchen.

"Where are you off to?" I ask, and she says, "To get my diary."

"Eh-Eh-Eh," I say. "It'll get wet."

"But I want to draw a mermaid," she says.

She is four and can't write a lot of letters yet, only the four that spell her name. So her journal is full of pictures and she only keeps it at all because I keep one and it makes her feel grown up. Sometimes, when I'm awake at night on account of such mundane human woes as thirst or the need to use the loo, I wonder how long I'll live, whether I'll live to see her reach the age I am now, whether I'll live to see graduations and boyfriends and husbands and grandchildren and more.

"A self-portrait," I say with a laugh. "Great idea. But you'll have to do it when you're above water." I'm still fanning myself and smiling.

"But we live down here," she says.

The line between real and pretend is ever-shifting in Luna's little brain but she likes to be the one to move it.

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*From the Antique Paper
Collection of Susan Snodgrass*

MAKE a PAPER MERMAID COLLAGE

Visit Faeriemagazine.com to make your own collage using pieces from Susan's Antique Paper Collection! You'll find three full pages—of fish and shells and the lovely mermaid pictured here. Print on cardstock, cut the pieces out, and arrange them into your own special work of art. For a three-dimensional effect, add small shells, tiny starfish, fine glitter, clear micro beads, jewels, green yarn for seaweed, and/or small cut-outs of lace or netting!



HOW TO MAKE a MERMAID TAIL

by Malinghi and Mermaid Iona

The merfolk community is growing by leaps and bounds, with more and more people swimming in tails for recreation every day. There's a growing list of tailmakers committed to meeting the needs of aspiring mermaids and mermen—with tails that range from simple to extravagant, and affordable to exorbitant. But it's possible to make your own tail, too, right in your own home!

So let's get started! The following tutorial uses the technique illustrated in the first online tailmaking tutorial, the popular YouTube video "How To Make a Mermaid Tail" by Sasha "FireGypsy" Gaulin.

Materials

- Chalk
- Pencil
- Sewing machine (preferably with a stretch stitch, such as a zigzag stitch)
- Monofin or bifins (we recommend FINIS)
- Stretchy fabric suitable for swimming (appx two yards)
- Matching thread
- Scissors
- Straight pins
- Poster board
- Tape
- Marker
- Masking tape
- Measuring tape

Pick a fabric

Typically you'll want spandex, lycra, or nylon, which you can find at your local fabric store, usually in the "Swim/Dance" section. Choose fabrics that stretch well and aren't too light, as too-thin material may become translucent when wet. Yardage will be figured below.

Make a pattern

Cut a long piece of masking tape and draw a marker line every two to three inches. Attach the tape to your legs beginning below your ankles and reaching to your belly button. Measure around your body, paying special attention to the ankles, knees, hips, and waist, and record the measurements in order from bottom to top. Divide all measurements by half.

Tape several pieces of poster board together (use duct tape or packaging tape). Place the measured masking tape down the center of the poster board. Using your halved measurements and the tape as your center point, transfer your measurements onto the poster board. Connect the dots on both sides to create an outline of your legs.

Wearing your monofin, sit on your pattern, within the lines. Tilt the monofin so that it's touching the poster board. Carefully take off the monofin so that it remains in place and trace the monofin onto the poster board. Hint: add more to the monofin pattern for extra fabric that will flow in the water. Remove your pattern from the poster board.

Fold your fabric in half, with the right sides together and the shiny side of the fabric facing the inside of the fold. Place your pattern in the center of the fabric and then trace it with chalk onto the fabric. After removing your pattern, pin both fabric pieces together just inside the chalk line. Add one inch for seam allowance all around. For the waist, add a few inches (this can be trimmed later if necessary).

Sew

Using a stretch stitch, sew your fabric together, from one side of the waist all the way down and around, stopping at the other side of the waist. Be sure to backstitch a few stitches at the beginning and end to lock the threads in place.

At the waistline, trim to size or fold over by one inch and sew.

Try on the tail while it's still inside out, mark loose areas with chalk, and sew to adjust. Turn your tail right side out and insert your fins or monofin.

Customize your new tail by adding dorsal or pectoral fins, various beads or baubles, and things that move well in the water. You're only limited by your imagination!

Malinghi and Mermaid Iona are the founders of the MerNetwork, a gathering place for mermaids and mermen that provides a forum to talk about costuming, tails, tailmakers, and mermaiding generally. Learn more at Mernetwork.com.



EMPTY Carolyn Turgeon

Even after I've been on land for years, long enough to wear out more than a few pairs of heels and wedges, sandals with straps that wrap up my aching, battered legs, I still dream of life in the water, and all I left behind.

I never dream of horses, or peacocks, or hounds, or men. I dream of manta rays spread out and flying above me, or giant squids passing by, their massive tentacles dangling down like necklaces, my own body gliding through the water.

Sometimes, when I am walking on land, in the moonlight, the house looms in front of me like a whale and the stars overhead seem like phytoplankton, trailing light through a black sea. At those moments I catch my breath, and remember. I stare up at a tree just as a breeze is coming through, all the leaves set to trembling, and I see whole schools of fish flitting by, and I want to swim alongside them, slapping them away with my hands. I see beautiful young girls with long, bare fingers, and I remember my sisters, how free we were as we pushed through the water. Their tails glittering in front of me. Pearls that we pulled out of oyster shells with our own fists, draped across their necks and arms. We were princesses then. Sometimes, when such nostalgia and longing come over me, it takes me a long time to come back again, open the front door and go inside.

It is hard, remembering. I walk through the rooms of our house and I pass through shipwrecks. Everything I see is an artifact from a different world.

I know this is what I wished for: this life, this man, this home, this child. These legs. But on nights like this, when my baby is crying in the next room and my husband lies asleep next to me, his hand on my thigh, the center of my body like a great wound, I hate this world.

My baby cries and cries, and I cannot quiet her.

My husband pushes his body into mine and I think *this body is broken*. Before, I was one clean line, streaking through the water.

Flying!

I think: *this is not who I am*.

And I imagine I can see them, my sisters, coming back for me. I look for bald heads, hoping they've given up their hair like they do in the story, so that I can return home. I go to the water. I take binoculars, I search the horizon for hours.

But the sea is empty. Why did they go away?

Why did I leave them?

Carolyn Turgeon is the author of five novels, including Mermaid and The Fairest of Them All. Learn more at CarolynTurgeon.com.



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set of seasticks when Zak swam into the dining room.

She got so distracted that she floated into the edge of the table.

No matter how many times she saw him he always took her breath away.

With his exotically golden skin and his dark gold hair, he looked like a piece of pirate treasure. His kelp-green eyes sparkled with mischief and his mouth stretched into a broader-than-usual smile, making a single dimple appear in his left cheek.

But as always, it was his tailfin that made him so very breath-stealing. Where Zanzia's was pale lavender, her brother's tailfin was the deepest violet. Rich, luscious purple that made Coral want to trace her fingertips along the scales.

Tonight he looked even cuter than usual, with his golden curls tamed by some kind of gel and his standard tee traded in for a dress shirt.

She wanted to melt just being in the same room with him.

"Hey Zanzie," he said with a smile, knowing she hated the nickname.

"Came back for more, Coral?"

Coral managed a smile. "Yes."

Always.

Zanzia swirled a plate toward her brother's head. He caught it easily and threw it back at her with a flourish. She stuck her tongue out at him as she set the plate on the table.

"Sea slug," Zanzia tossed over her shoulder as she swam back to the kitchen.

For a moment, Coral and Zak were alone in the dining room. This was her chance. Her opportunity to tell him, to ask him, to say ... something. To ask him to the seaball game at school next week. That was her plan. No big deal, no strings attached. Just a simple date. Just ask.

But what came out was, "Um"

Then, before she could even think of more words to add to that stellar start, there was a knock at the front door. Zak's eyes widened and he spun away, the biggest smile she had ever seen on his face.

Warning bells gonged in her mind. Puzzle pieces fell into place.

The extra seat at the table for Zak's *friend*.

His carefully groomed hair and dress shirt.

His huger than huge smile.

Coral watched with a sense of dread as Zak returned to the dining room with a beautiful mergirl at his side. She was obviously older than Coral, probably 17 or 18, like Zak. Her long, flowing blond hair—so pale it was almost white—swirled around her like a net. The light from the overhead fixture glinted off the sequins on her ivory tank dress, making her look like a true angelfish.

"Coral, this is Angeliera."

Of course she was.

He shrugged his shoulder in a funny way, and Coral's gaze drifted down along his arm ... to where he and the angelfish were holding hands.

"My girlfriend."

Coral's breath caught in her throat. She drifted into the table again, wrapped her hands around the back of a chair to hold steady.

A fin-flick later, Zanzia swam into the room, followed soon after by Mr. and Mrs. Marlin. As the family oohed and cooed over Zak's girlfriend, Coral kept herself from crying.

This wasn't the end of the world. The angelfish was his girlfriend. They weren't bonded for life or anything—yet.

Eventually it would end, and when that day came Coral would be ready. When Zak and the angelfish broke up, Coral would take the chance she'd been ready to take tonight.

And by then she would be the Coral she had always dreamed of being.

Virginia Hankins is an actress, stuntwoman, knight, archer, and professional mermaid. She played Joan of Arc on Spike TV's hit show Deadliest Warrior and is a stunt archery coordinator for the film industry. She's also the founder of Sheroes Entertainment, a water-based performance troupe famous for its mermaid appearances at Paris Fashion Week with Prophetik designer Jeff Garner and its realistic film and private party production work in Hollywood and Southern California. Find out more at virginiahankins.com and sheroesentertainment.com.

Tera Lynn Childs always wanted to be a mermaid, but instead became an award-winning author of teen fiction about mermaids, Wmonsters, and mythology. Find out more about her Forgive My Fins series and other books at teralynnchilds.com.

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These mummies clearly owed their success—if, indeed, they met with success—to both the romantic notion of beautiful sea nymphs and a morbid curiosity regarding the depths of entertainment. P.T. Barnum’s notorious Feejee Mermaid, the most famous of all mermaid mummies, enjoyed the best of both celebrities, as Barnum proved a master of fantasy and disappointment. He drew folks to the mermaid exhibit by promoting the grisly paste up as a specimen of beauty and as a perverse piece of humbug. Many spectators regarded sideshow entertainments as a kind of vaudeville, and Barnum’s bait-and-switch enticed with a sordid comic horror.

Similarly, the newspaper writers of the time delighted in admonishing and exposing the mermaid-mummy exhibitors while also giddily describing the mummies’ every frayed edge. *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, a London publication, spilled much ink debating the authenticity of a mermaid display in 1822. One author saw more danger than just fraud, suggesting that “young children are frequently kidnapped for the purpose of making them a ‘Koo-Shoo.’ Their limbs, trunk, and head are moulded into a variety of strange and unnatural forms, and their eyes are not infrequently put out!”

In 1824 a mermaid mummy showman known in New York as Captain Dodge provoked a writer for *The New-York Mirror*, and *Ladies’ Literary Gazette* to write: “If the skin of a large cod-fish stuffed, with a skeleton of a child’s body put on in the place of the cod’s head, the jaws and teeth of a cat inserted into that which represents the head of the child, and the whole, except the scaly part enveloped in a bladder, or some other skinny substance, and smoked well with burning camphor, can make a Mermaid, then as sure as fish is a fish, or as certainly as Dr. Mitchill is a great philosopher and no witch, there is a Mermaid now to be seen in the room adjoining the New-England Museum, Court-street—where may be seen a great many curiosities for the small sum of twenty-five cents.”

While the mermaid mummy has not enjoyed a revival, the defunct tabloid *Weekly World News* spent many years exploiting mermaids through the 1980s, ‘90s, and 2000s, with articles about mermaid sushi, a live mermaid found in a can of sardines, mermaids frolicking lasciviously for a “Mermaids Gone Wild!” video, and, of course, the discovery of mermaid skeletons. One piece from 1985 proves a perfect marriage of the narcoleptic allure of dead mermaids and their mythical beauty: the mummified remains of a 3,000-year-old mermaid were reportedly discovered in Russia, wearing a crown of seashells, pearls, and diamonds, and “most likely considered a queen or a goddess.”

Timothy Schaffert is the author of several novels, including The Coffins of Little Hope and his latest, The Swan Gondola. Visit Timothyschaffert.com.

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“Okay,” I say, but she already has crayons in hand. “Just this once,” I add, then I get up and shimmy into the kitchen and come back with a clear plastic Ziploc bag. “When you’re done you can store it in here to keep it dry.” Her mermaid is pink and more pink—tail, hair, eyes, everything. “And we’ll find a good place to hide it.”

“What about behind that shell?” She points to an ashtray on the coffee table. Every time I look at that thing I think, *We should get rid of that.*

Ashtrays have no place in mermaid houses but there is the not-so-small matter of her father, the mortal I love in such a mortal way.

“Let’s look around,” I say, and I pretend to swim around the room, arms stretching through air. “I bet there’s a submarine around here somewhere or a shipwreck or a—”

“There’s one!” Luna shouts. She shimmies over to a bunch of books that fell off the bookshelf when she pulled her mermaid book out right before we started to pretend we were swimmers and not walkers. They lay in a jagged pile and I like that her brain sees that sort of chaos and ruin and thinks, *Shipwreck!*

There’s a photo of me in one of those books, a book called *The Mermaid’s Secret*. Luna loves to look at it—mermaid me, about to kiss a seahorse—and squeals, “Tell me about when you were a mermaid!” whenever her clumsy hands find the book when she skips the shelves at bedtime.

So I do.

I tell her about the way my tail made me feel whole, the way my scalp tingled whenever the water lifted my hair, the way it felt to have the sea tickling every inch of my skin. I tickle her then and she squeals and says, “Mommy. I want to be a mermaid, too. Can I be a mermaid when I grow up?”

“You can be anything you want when you grow up,” I tell her.

“I wanna be a mermaid!” she screams, jumping on the bed every time. “I wanna be a mermaid! Can I? Can I?”

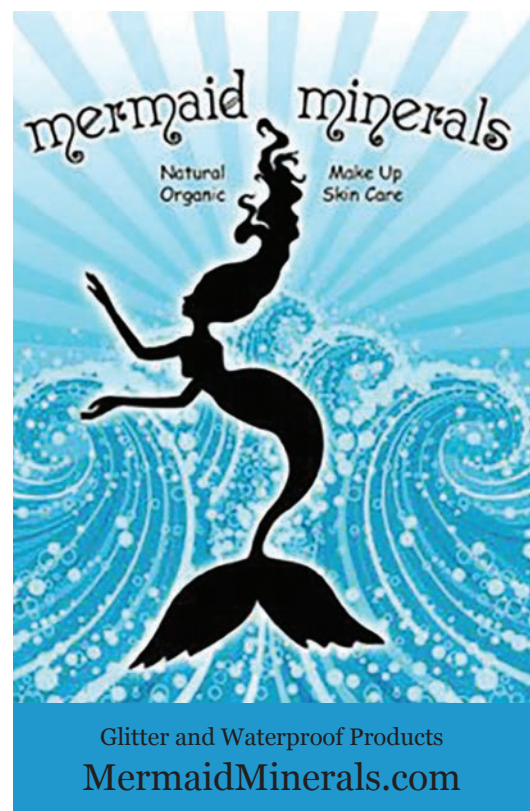
And when she finally settles and when her warm breath calms and her bear-brown eyes are at half-mast in the dimly lit room where she sleeps—where mermaid stickers cling to the walls for dear life, and where stuffed mermaids outnumber bears and bunnies by far—I kiss her on the forehead and think that I want nothing more for her in the whole world than to get that wish, to know that happiness, then to maybe have a photograph of it captured in a book that she can give to her daughter—the granddaughter I hope to one day meet and know and play mermaid with.

For that, I would clean any oven. Any day. If that’s all it took for her to hold the world by its tail.

Tara Altebrando is the author of several novels for teens and adults, including, most recently, The Best Night of Your (Pathetic) Life and Roomies, coauthored with Sara Zarr. Taraaltebrando.com.



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Embrace the spirit of the mermaid, which to me means being mysterious. If that fails, stay wet and keep your tail up!
Tabatha Coffey, TV Personality and Hairstylist

Always keep a stagehand in a wetsuit floating nearby and remember, when the director says "Look out for the rocks," it probably means you're already too close!
Marta Kristen, Actress, Lorelei in Beach Blanket Bingo

Know that you must treat life like the ocean. Learn to flow with the swells and currents and don't lose self esteem or focus. Have confidence and a siren sense of happiness and independence.
Carmindy, TV Personality and Makeup Artist

Sing until you're hoarse and then clear again. Sing until lovelorn men and girls brave the slippery sharpness of those rocks to gather like children around your tail. Sing yourself enchanted. The most important mermaid to convince, after all, is yourself.
Jeanine Cummins, Author

Don't be afraid to bring out the Glamorous in you every now and then—and oh ... learn how to swim! And do it with Style! Own your strength and sexuality and be confident in yourself.
Nick Verreos, TV Personality and Fashion Designer

Remember that history gets written by the winners, and what we know about mermaids comes from people who probably didn't understand them properly. They're not just pretty, long-haired seductresses. They're fierce and intelligent and full of wisdom and experience, just like you.
Michelle Tea, Author

Go for it. Show us your talents and be the best you can be. But beware of wild mermaids as I've heard they can be dangerous and unpredictable!
Alexandria the Great, "The Houdini Housewife"

Be what you are to the fullest. This world needs your kind of magic!
Krysztof Nemeth, Pin-Up Artist

Beware of the undertow and always bathe in moonlight.
David Delamare, Artist

Stay away from the East River!
Amy Shearn, Author

ADVICE FOR ASPIRING MERMAIDS

A roundup of helpful advice from the blog I Am A Mermaid

Green sparkly body paint. Seaweed wig. And when the dude comes to save you, tell him to take a hike.
It's better in the ocean.
Claudia Gonson, Musician, The Magnetic Fields

Be good to the ocean. Do what you can to keep her clean and her creatures alive and well. Love the sea and she'll love you back.
Dottie Lux, Burlesque Performer

Get training in CPR (beautiful sailors aren't just going to rescue themselves, you know!)
Lee Moyer, Artist

Learning to swim would be helpful!
Amanda Righetti, Actress

Let it come naturally. Let it be about the water, about the peace and meditation. Let it be for friendship and community and beauty. Do it to set your heart free, if your heart longs for the sea.
Sora Dancing Mermaid

It doesn't matter if you are young or old, fat or skinny, beautiful or ugly. If you have a fish tail ... you are a mermaid!
Dick Zigun, creator of the Coney Island Mermaid Parade

I would have to argue that there are no aspiring mermaids... only mermaids. Perhaps they're land-locked, perhaps they don't have their own tail, but they're mermaids at heart nonetheless.
Mermaid Shelly

Within the thriving burlesque scene in Berlin, Germany, is one real-life singing mermaid who goes by the name Lorelei Vanora. Lorelei is the creation of artist Laura Carleton, who's loved mermaids since she was a child growing up in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Though Lorelei Vanora is currently only a singing mermaid and not a swimming mermaid, Laura "likes the idea that even a late-night Berlin club can contain a bit of the sea for a moment or two when Lorelei Vanora sings."





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