
Lawrence Earley’s *The Workboats of Core Sound* is a moving tribute in word and image to the fierce independence and the tenacity of the people of the Down East fishing communities and of the workboats that have given them identity and connection for nearly three centuries. The book also records the author’s personal journey to understanding and appreciating these communities. In the 1980s, Earley was initially drawn to photographing the austere beauty of the Core Sound area with its vast vistas of sky and water and salt marshes, and of its ever-present workboats, but he confesses “I did not appreciate then how a photograph can be a doorway into another world. Nor did I know that the act of making photographs would have such a profound effect on my own life, teaching me lessons about friendship and community, time and memory, pride and loss.”

What he came to realize much later, through conversations with Core Sound boat builders and fishermen, was that these beautifully crafted, hand-built wooden fishing boats were unique, and that through the generations they were the bearers of a social history binding communities and people together.

The older a boat, the wider its network of connections. In the aggregate, these layers of detailed information sometimes enabled me to assemble a boat’s “family tree,” a genealogical web of connections and memories with the boat at the center. Indeed, a workboat plays another role in the community besides the practical purposes for which it was built. The stories and memories associated with a boat are like family tales told around the dinner table and passed down from one generation to another. They are as important to community life as family stories are to family life. Stories exist at large in these communities, and in a sense they draw people together. Workboats link people, families, and communities.

Beginning around 2004, Earley spent several years photographing Core Sound workboats and interviewing people from the Down East fishing villages, getting to know them and their lives. The result is this book of elegant prose, colorful stories, and stunningly beautiful, fine-grained black-and-white photographs documenting a way of life that may well be passing. He traces the geography of the region and its villages, the history of the varied styles of boatbuilding, the hard work of fishing itself, and the changing world that is engulfing these communities.

At the heart of the book is the Core Sound workboat that connects community and individual. “Though made of perishable wood, the old workboats of Core Sound are surely one of the glories of the Down East Region,” Earley writes. “They are monuments to some of the best of all human impulses: to hard work, to wrest elegant designs out of stubborn materials, and to craft things of utility and beauty. They strengthen the web of community bonds that would inevitably
weaken without them, and thus they preserve an essential part of Down East culture. They are the history keepers, the memory keepers in a region that is looking to the future. They are compass points for communities seeking a new direction.”

This is a welcome book and is recommended for public and academic libraries.

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