The Eastern Shore in Robert de Gast’s Wake

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Abstract

When any space becomes familiar, it becomes a place. Thus, place is a uniquely personal concept. This project began with a passion to explore this place I now call home—the Eastern Shore—and find a way to best define that sense of place. Evoked by one specific text, Western Wind Eastern Shore: A Sailing Cruise around the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia (1975), written and photographed by Robert de Gast, I discovered the means to achieve both goals: follow in his wake, by circumnavigating the Eastern Shore by boat; and to capture that experience via writing a personal essay, including photographs, of the places we visited—just as de Gast did. Through this process, I discover that sense of place cannot be easily defined except through being conscious of one’s experiences as one inhabits or moves through a range of natural, built and social environments. Putting myself on a boat, with particular companions, on a planned route, provided me with a range of such experiences, a narrative for making sense of them, and the focus necessary for that consciousness. In performing my own engagement with place, I found I was able to create my own personal definition of place in relation to the Eastern Shore.

This interdisciplinary project also includes an examination of academic literature from 1965 to present day dedicated to defining sense of place, revealing a critical consensus that describes places as those locations that have been given meaning by human experience. I then examine the relationship between photography and stories about place—two of the primary tools for recording facets of sense of place—which help provide evidence of the human
experience in a landscape. Finally, I review nine books that—via their authors’ personal narratives and photography—attempt to explore sense of place on the Eastern Shore.
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The Eastern Shore in Robert de Gast’s Wake


Introduction


Chapter Three

Joseph T. Rothrock, [title unknown], 1883, © Collection of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.


[Photographer unknown], “Joe Richards and his beloved Friendship sloop Princess get under way in a calm,” [date unknown], 1980.79.840. © Mystic Seaport, Photography Collection, Mystic, CT.


Acknowledgements

Andrew, my son, who at nine said “heck, yeah,” when asked if he’d take an eight-day, 640-mile voyage in a twenty-two-foot Grady White around Delmarva with me.

Libby Moose, who when asked if we could borrow her twenty-two-foot Grady White to undertake such a circumnavigation, responded, “Only if I can come with you!”

Pete Lesher, chief curator at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, for advising on the voyagers around the Eastern Shore whose stories I should be reading. And to Izzy Mercado, our communications and art director, who helped make my creative element a work of art. In fact, to all my staff at CBMM—thank you!

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And not least, my wife, Lori Ramsey. One day, early 2016, when visiting Durham, NC, from St. Michaels, MD, when I thought I’d never have the time to complete this master’s program, she insisted we take a driving tour of Duke’s campus, continuously lauding the incredible scenery and architecture, and if only I completed my master’s—after four years of very hard work plus a two-year hiatus—I could call this my own. On that same drive, I visited the Graduate Liberal Studies office, was graciously received by Donna Zapf, who there and then outlined a plan for me to be able to finish.

Tēnā koutou!
The Eastern Shore in Robert de Gast's Wake
Getting Ready

Having finally decided on the topic for my Duke University Master’s thesis—exploring the concept of “place” in relation to the Eastern Shore—I discovered Robert de Gast’s book *Western Wind, Eastern Shore: A Sailing Cruise around the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia*. Published in 1975, de Gast records a twenty-four-day circumnavigation he made in 1973 of the Eastern Shore—the famed Delmarva peninsula—in his twenty-two-foot keel-centerboard sloop, *Slick Ca’m*. I had discovered de Gast’s books and photographs through my work as president of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, in St. Michaels, Maryland. His black-and-white photographs from the Chesapeake region reside in the permanent collection of the museum; and our exhibition featuring his work, *Robert de Gast’s Chesapeake*, will open May 12, 2017.

Sadly, in late 2015, we discovered that de Gast was dying of cancer, lying in a hospice in Annapolis. He agreed that he would meet with us. Pete Lesher, chief curator for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, traveled to spend time with de Gast, to record in his words his recollections of each of the eighty photographs he had taken that were being included in the exhibition. We wanted the exhibition labels and accompanying catalogue to reflect his memories of that place, landscape, and time.

We were just in time as de Gast died about a month later, in early January 2016. His obituaries were poignant, and readily paid homage to his writing and photography.

In August 2016, I decided that to truly explore sense of place as de Gast had with *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*, I needed to follow his 659-mile voyage around Delmarva peninsula. But I had only ten or so days for the voyage, not de Gast’s twenty-four, and by sailing—my preferred mode of transport—I wouldn’t be able to
complete the voyage in time. I needed a fast boat, which also had to have the shallow
draft Slick Ca’m had. In their classic book, Cruises: Mainly in the Bay of the
Chesapeake (1956), Robert and George Barrie, Jr. give sound advice: “To thoroughly
explore the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, one should have a vessel of no more
than three feet draught—that is, if one wishes to look into every nook and cranny, to
investigate places never seen and for that matter never imagined by the great
majority of yachtsmen.” I had just a week to find such a boat, trying to fit within my
own work schedule and that of my nine-year-old son’s, Andrew, who was due back at
school in just a few weeks. I wanted to take him with me, and he readily wanted to
share in the adventure.

I asked around my staff: do you know of anyone with a twenty-two foot or so
runabout, with fast outboard, that I could borrow for ten days or so? I wasn’t getting
anywhere.

I had lunch with a dear friend we had made since we’d moved to St. Michaels in mid-
July 2014. She had a twenty-two-foot Grady White Seafarer, with a 225hp outboard,
called Ariel. It would be perfect; super-fast, ninety-gallon fuel tanks, a good-sized
cockpit, and a small for’ad cabin with a double bunk.

KG: "Libby, could I please borrow your boat?"
L: "Why?"

I told her why.

L: "On one condition."
KG: "Name it."
L: "That you take me with you. It’s been on my bucket list for years."
KG: "You’re on!"

Later, my wife Lori would growl at me for only giving Libby a week’s notice. I
assured her that if I had given Libby more, she wouldn’t have come. Libby later
confirmed that I had been absolutely correct.

Andrew and I spent the day packing the day before we planned to cast off, very
excited that we were leaving the next morning. We bought twelve five-liter bottles of
water, as well as packs of instant porridge, marmalade, Marmite, and a few other
snacks. Even if Libby didn’t want to sleep on the boat each evening, we planned to,
and make our own breakfasts and lunches. We each packed a small canvas bag of
clothes, fleece blankets for sleeping, and charts. Then we headed to Higgins Yacht
Yard where Libby’s boat is slipped to load up. Once on the boat with the first load, it
was easier to remember what we’d left at home—the two canoe paddles I’d
promised Libby I’d bring as back up in case the outboard died, as well as three spare
five-gallon fuel containers—one full of petrol. We headed home to collect them, and returned to the boat. Once the drinking water was aboard and packed away under the cockpit seat hatches, it didn’t look as though we had enough. Andrew and I headed into town to the local grocery, and bought another ten five-liter bottles. Surely 110 liters of water would be enough to see us through! [In eight days, we would end up drinking only two containers—ten liters—but we were prepared!]

That evening, Libby texted that a Small Craft Advisory had just been issued:

L: "Craft Advisory: Winds... 18 to 33 knots. Perhaps we’d better postpone leaving until Monday morning."
KG: "Let’s wait until later this evening and check weather again."
L: "Standing by!"

Half-an-hour passed...

L: "I just went to the dock & talked to 2 watermen. They said it would be risky tomorrow. I think weather Monday is supposed to be beautiful for a while. If forecast changes overnight we can reevaluate. Now I think we should wait. Sorry."
KG: "No need to apologize! Monday it is."
I had another beer and sat down to watch a movie with Andrew. I was officially on holiday.

I'd posted on Instagram a photo of Andrew lying on Ariel's foredeck; “mhergan” responded:

mhergan: "That's a great trip! Enjoy! We did it in 8 days in a 17' Boston Whaler."
KG: "Did you go inside south of Ocean City?"
mhergan: "We attempted to go inside on our way north from Cape Charles but it was too shallow following channel. Had to follow the crab pots for deep water. Headed outside at first inlet. Electronic Garmin charts not even close to accurate of inlets. I believe Channel Marks have been pulled in a notice to Mariners I read. Went inside at Chincoteague to Ocean City with no problems. Canal Fenwick to Indian River very shallow."

The next day, as forecast, was a very stiff southerly, and by noon was pouring with rain. We'd made the smart decision to wait twenty-four hours.
If readers of this personal essay are familiar with de Gast's book, *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*, or perhaps his other two more well-known photography books, *The Oystermen of the Chesapeake* (1970), and *The Lighthouses of the Chesapeake* (1973), I hope you may find some familiarity with the writing style, design of these pages, and the use of photographs—black and white, de Gast's primary photographic technique—as well as their sizing. De Gast outlines his premise in the preface to *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*:

The book is not a cruising guide, although it might be helpful to sailors contemplating a similar journey; nor is it a history or description of the Eastern Shore . . . Rather, it is an eclectic collection of remembered sights and sounds that focuses mainly on the edge of the Shore—the sailing route . . . The
photographs became quick sketches, instant visual impressions—snapshots, if you will. I made all the photographs from the cockpit of my little sloop, usually while under way, with my foot on the tiller and my hand on the camera. Some of the photographs reproduced here are intentionally small to help convey my feeling about the Eastern Shore’s environment. The Shore is distinguished by a quiet, insinuating beauty, rather than by grandiose and over-whelming scenery . . . Nor did I choose the photographs to illustrate the text. They are intended to combine with the text, to give the reader my impressions of some of the land-and seascapes I encountered that seemed to me to convey the essence of the edge of the Shore.

The First Day: St. Michaels to Chesapeake City

The Second Day: Chesapeake City to Lewes

The Third Day: Lewes to Wachapreague

The Fourth Day: Wachapreague to Onancock

The Fifth Day: Onancock to Tangier Island

The Sixth Day: Tangier Island to Smith Island

The Seventh Day: Smith Island to Cambridge

The Eighth Day: Cambridge to St. Michaels
The First Day:
83 Miles

St. Michaels to Chesapeake City
“It was nine in the morning, and a blustery day... The sky was blue, the wind out of the northwest... I cast off my lines.” With these words Robert de Gast set off in 1973. We did exactly the same, under the exact conditions, but from our home port of St. Michaels, on the Miles River of the Eastern Shore.
We were fairly sheltered leaving the Miles, but as we passed between Tilghman Point to port and Bennett Point a’ starboard, the fifteen-knot northerly hit us head on, kicking up a short, sharp two-to-three-foot chop. I powered down from twenty knots to a drier speed. Coming into Prospect Bay, Kent Island Bridge could be seen in the distance, denoting Kent Island Narrows. The Narrows is a narrow stretch of water separating Kent Island from the Eastern Shore. Full tidal flow can reach four knots. We slowed down running through the channel to a no-wake speed, keeping to starboard to leave room for the much bigger power boats bearing down on us. The noise of traffic thundered overhead. Past the bridge, the well-marked channel bears a hard right, and then hard left, as an even narrower channel leads out into the Chester River. Our destination this evening was Chesapeake City, on the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal. It took de Gast four days to reach Chesapeake City—we were going to do it in one.

With the stiff northerly and now even rougher three-foot chop, it was slow going as we pounded our way north—with spray flying, it was a wet ride. Libby suggested Rock Hall for lunch. I had packed a week’s worth of bread, jams and marmalade for lunches, but Libby was having nothing of it.

A couple of miles off Eastern Neck we passed a pound net, the oldest type of net used by watermen. Wooden stakes are pushed into the bottom of the Bay, spaced apart in a line that runs across the tide. Nets are strung between the stakes and along the
bottom of the river, making a fish trap. From a distance, birds were perched atop nearly every stake. I said aloud that I was sure they were American eagles; sure enough—ten or more of them.

Way back in the distance behind us was the Bay Bridge, properly known as the Governor William Preston Lane, Jr., Memorial Bridge. No wonder everyone calls it just “the Bay Bridge,” or, on the Eastern Shore, just "the Bridge." The first bridge opened in 1952, and was a long awaited link with the Eastern Shore. Nearly overnight the ferries that brought holiday makers from Annapolis and Baltimore to the Eastern Shore went out of business. In 1973, a second parallel span opened, as the first could barely cope with the millions of cars trying to cross each year.

Near noon we powered down and dawdled into Rock Hall Harbor. Founded in 1707, the town is promoted locally as “The Pearl of the Chesapeake.” I couldn’t see why; it looked very quiet. I was pleased to see a familiar buyboat, *P. E. Pruitt*, tied up to a pier, looking in great shape, with an unfamiliar more worked looking one, *Ellen Marie*, just a few boats up.

We tied up to a jetty in front of The Harbor Shack. There were a few staff milling around in the restaurant, but no one else eating. Kat came to take our order. She’d lived in Rock Hall since 2007. Then, she couldn’t find a house to buy; now, every house is for sale. All the shops on Main Street are pretty much closed. This restaurant used to be open year-round; now, it’s closed for three months in the winter.
Back on the water, heading north again, and still very rough and windy, we passed Tolchester and Fairlee Creek. A few miles north is Worton Creek, where de Gast pulled in to anchor on his second night. We followed his route in. Sitting at anchor, in the rain, de Gast read from Cruises: Mainly in the Bay of the Chesapeake (1956),
and Robert and George Barrie’s description of Worton Creek, as it appeared to them in the 1880s: “Worton Creek is one of the snuggest anchorages imaginable. Seven feet can be carried up the creek to where it is completely landlocked. The wind can blow from any direction and one does not get a breath of it... the banks are very high, and on the top of them are high trees. It would be a grand place to lie on a winter’s night with a hard northwester blowing. One could sit peacefully near the cabin stove with no fear of dragging.” When de Gast visited in 1973, the place hadn’t changed a bit from when the Barrie’s had, with more than three hundred boats at their marina moorings. In 2016, it still really hadn’t changed, the beauty of the hidden anchorage snaking its way around the point, and a few hundred sloops docked at the marina, with states such as Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland stenciled on their transoms. The tree line was luscious, with no pines to break the view.

Turning about we headed out past the one red and two green channel markers, and clear of the shore pushed the throttle up. As soon as we rounded the northern point I brought the throttle back down as we continued slamming into the chop. It was going to be slow going with the strong nor-easterly.

We turned to starboard to make our way up the wide mouth of the Sassafras River. De Gast had spent the night off the Sassafras on his third day, right up in “the placid lagoon” of Turner Creek. We weren’t to make it—the chop was right on the nose,
making very slow progress, and we wanted to be in Chesapeake City before dark. I headed us back out into the Chesapeake Bay, spray still flying, hanging tightly on. I found I could brace better standing at the wheel, rather than sitting on the helm’s chair. Sitting behind me in the cockpit, Andrew was loving it.

South of Rock Hall heading north, gone are the flats of the lower Eastern Shore, all the way down to Cape Charles. Rolling hills and some cliffs bank the eastern side of the Chesapeake Bay this far north. I realized I hadn’t seen elevation of this sort in some time.

We weren’t the only ones out on the Bay. A number of sloops were sailing down the Bay, further out in the main channel, all sail up and flying with their wind astern. They were glorious sights.

Within an hour, we passed Turkey Point and entered the protection of the Elk River. Our passage immediately calmed with the protection of Elk Neck State Park to port and Cecil County hills to starboard. To our right was a trailer park fanning up a hill, with acres of prefab homes in strict parallel lines to each other, tightly packed. They had an amazing view across the Elk River to the state park. The houses reminded me of a deserted Turkish town I had explored decades ago on a two-week sailing cruise along the Turkish coastline. From a distance my view looked eerily like the same abandoned, white-weathered worn ruins from World War II I had seen then.

A half-hour later we entered the near flat calm—though still windy—instantly narrow, Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, more well known as the C&D Canal, or just C&D to the locals. Joseph Rothrock’s words from Vacation Cruising in Chesapeake and Delaware Bays (1884) came to mind: “Who does not dread the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, if he has any regard for his own vessel?” But I was excited—I’d always wanted to travel the canal.

The C&D runs fourteen miles long, is 450 feet wide, and thirty-five feet deep across Maryland and Delaware, and connects the Chesapeake Bay—and Port of Baltimore—to the Delaware River. It’s a marvel of engineering, and hard to believe it opened in 1829 as a canal ten feet deep and thirty-six feet wide with four locks—each only twenty-two feet wide—to navigate. Over the next century, the canal was twice widened and deepened to accommodate the increased shipping volume. Finally, in the early 1960s, it was built to its current dimensions—the locks had been removed in 1919, courtesy of Theodore Roosevelt.

De Gast was disappointed that he couldn’t sail up the canal—he had a twenty-knot easterly behind him—having to revert to his outboard. He quotes from The Code of Federal Regulations, Title 33, paragraph 207.100, sub section (s), which states very clearly: “Sailboats. Transiting the canal by vessels under sail will not be permitted.” (The regulations are now found in 33 CFR 162.4 15.f.) He was tempted to sail
anyway, but knew there were security cameras monitoring the canal.
Immediately in view is the Chesapeake City Bridge. I had driven over it just the week before to visit with board members of the Havre de Grace Maritime Museum, on the edge of the Susquehanna Flats. It was still one lane only, with the same traffic backed up I’d experienced, as the side railings were being sand blasted and repainted.

Across the canal from Chesapeake City, against a strong tide, we pulled into a dock to refuel, pumping in thirty-five gallons. Topped up for the next day, we motored across to Chesapeake City. It had taken de Gast four days to reach this point, and he’d experienced as rough weather as we had. We pulled into the same small anchorage basin on the Eastern Shore side of the canal as he had, and tied up to the free city dock. With bags in hand, we walked the hundred feet or so to our lodgings, the Old Wharf Cottage, built in 1849 by Herbert S. Bean, right on the bank of the canal.

At dinner, I quizzed our wait staff Megan about working in Chesapeake City. She’d worked five summers at the restaurant, and had noticed an increase in clientele, both via car and water. I wondered whether we were in Maryland or Delaware—she put me right that we were still in Maryland, but Delaware was a five-minute drive to the east, where she lived. She had a boyfriend in the Air Force stationed in Germany, and was planning to do her Masters via University of Phoenix online. She thought she may move to Germany.

We’d promised Andrew ice cream for desert, but town was closed. At the restaurant who managed our lodgings, the owner went away and brought back three heaped bowls of the best, creamiest ice cream ever, from a local dairy, free of charge. As de Gast experienced in the same town, “He wouldn’t accept payment. It was typical of the self-effacing helpfulness I was later to experience many times on my journey.” Some things don’t change.

Waiting to fall asleep that night, Andrew snoring softly beside me, I felt just like de Gast: “I now had the feeling—finally—that I was actually going around the Eastern Shore. Tomorrow I would be in the Delaware River.”
The Second Day:
79 Miles

Chesapeake City to Lewes
It’s 0307 hours and I’ve been awake for the last two-and-a-half hours watching enormous ships going past my window. I shake Andrew up to watch Navig8 Adventurine glide past; it’s flagged in the Marshall Islands, an oil/chemical tanker with a draught of 8.5 meters, 184 meters long and a beam of 27 meters, built in 2015, having left the Port of Baltimore yesterday at 17:14:00. Like me, he is astonished at the size of the ship. The view completely fills our glassed sliding doors.
Earlier, while Andrew slept, a car carrier, *Sebring Express*, from Panama, had slipped past; 180 meters long with a beam of 30 meters. *Mercury Ace* went past forty-seven minutes prior to that, and also blocked the windows at 199.97 meters long, 32.26 meters wide and enormously high. De Gast didn’t have the smart phone app, Marine Traffic.

*Navig8 Adventurine* is the last ship shown on the app to be coming through for the next few hours. We try to go back to sleep.

Six hours later, we’re back on the water. For breakfast we wandered up the road to the Bohemia Café. Morgan Lindsay serves us, with a lovely smile. She’s lived in Chesapeake City all her life, and went to the school just up the road with 99 other children. Nothing much has changed, she says: poorer folks are leaving, being pushed out by the wealthier folks moving in; and homes are in foreclosure. She’s a sophomore at the University of Delaware, hoping to earn enough hours to go to physician assistant school.

It took us an hour to complete the rest of the canal, with only one other boat passing us. We go slowly, not sure if we’re allowed to kick up a wash or not. But that gives us time to enjoy the most wonderful morning—utter blue skies and not a breath of wind—the water is glassy. Andrew loves this speed as only then will I allow him to
sit up at the bow. We spend the hour bridge spotting. There are six in total, plus one natural gas pipeline.

We emerge from the canal at ten, the exact same time de Gast does. We’re on the Delaware River, and just as de Gast experienced, there’s not a “hint of a breeze.” Steam from the waterfront Salem Nuclear Power Plant plumes straight up—standing in New Jersey, and built in 1977; de Gast may have seen its construction cranes. The only relief from the heat is the welcome breeze we make as we rip along at twenty-six knots.
“Dozens of tankers and freighters made their way up and down the river. [We] stayed outside the shipping lane, skirting the low and marshy western shores.” As a cruising ground the Delaware is universally disliked. The *Cruising Guide* minces no words: “...there is one body of water on which there is complete agreement; we haven’t heard one dissenting voice—[yachtsmen] all dislike it with varying degrees of eloquence according to their gifts of self-expression. We are speaking of Delaware Bay.” De Gast agrees that “this body of water does not offer pleasant sailing, but some of its fringes are strikingly beautiful, particularly the area around Smyrna River.”

As we follow these fringes, in about eight feet in water, I have to concentrate to dodge the crab pot buoys that are thickly spread about a mile offshore. There are thousands of them, mile after mile. With the boat’s very stiff wheel, it’s tiring work, and there’s no way I can keep a straight course. We then lose the navigation detail on the GPS, and have to use my spare hand-held Garmin and charts to find the entrance to the Smyrna River. The landscape is so uniform it takes a keen eye to see any break in the fringed shore line.

By mid-afternoon de Gast reached the mouth of the Smyrna River. We get there at eleven, having clocked thirty miles. A crabbing boat—a deadrise—speeds past our bow and vanishes into the marshes. We’ve found the entrance. We follow him at a great clip the three miles up the windy river. After a half-mile or so I’m not as brave to go that fast, so cut the revs down a notch to a calmer speed. “One more bend around the corner” we reach the bridge that stops forward progress, and where de Gast runs out of fuel for his outboard. He sputters to a stop, right at the “disintegrating dock, dilapidated shed, and the rusty remains of a small marine railway.” In 1973, it hadn’t changed in the thirty-four years since Joe Richards visited in July 1940, in his friendship sloop, *Princess*. Seeking shelter from a harrowing gale on the Delaware, I can intensely feel Richards’ sense of relief: “To be
transported so suddenly from the hammering violence of the Delaware to this silence and this beauty made me wonder for a moment if I was alive. To find this deep river, to be folded in the silence of this tall grass, to move without sound or wind or without grounding through the majesty of these towering, golden-green reeds when the mind is tired and the body starved for sleep is an accident. As I held to the mast and saw the peaceful pastures, the motionless low hills, the quiet farmland between the thinning blades of the reeds, I knew I was dead or crazy.”

In 2016, it still hasn’t changed much. The dock has been replaced, but abandoned boats litter the shore, slowly consumed by weeds and vines. Two men on the deadrise we followed are unloading crabs and reluctant to wave in return. De Gast stayed the night at anchor, “in the most deserted and most desolate area in Delaware.” We turn and wind our way back to the Delaware, on a southerly course for Roosevelt Inlet, at Lewes. De Gast would also spend the night there.

Hungry for lunch, I stopped the boat two hundred feet off the marshes to make sandwiches. We were immediately attacked by very large green back flies, with very mean bites. Thankfully they are slow enough to be able to smack them—many soon littered the cockpit floor. I picked up speed and we ate on the run. Once again we were dodging hundreds and hundreds of crab pots.
I was intrigued by the contrast between the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, and the coast we were now following down the Delaware. The Bay offers a myriad of choices of long rivers and inlets to explore—the entire Chesapeake Bay shoreline is four thousand miles! Yet this coastline is mostly shoreline, hidden by marsh grass.

Before ending our day at Lewes (pronounced Lewis), Libby directed us to Mispillion. Flanking the entrance to the Mispillion River, the town is renowned for its bird watching. A red roofed building right on the water front is devoted to the story of the species that migrate through or live year-round. It was not hard to notice that Mispillion will be hit hard by climate change. A digger was working to erect a rock barrier between the town and the Delaware. A road we passed looked suspiciously the same level as the Mispillion River. We were impressed with the constant toing and froing of four very fast ships from the Delaware Supply Company. They were carrying supplies and crew to oil tankers anchored a few miles offshore, in the Big Stone Anchorage.

At three-thirty we tied up at the Lewes Yacht Club, first refueling. We’d used 17.7 gallons since leaving Chesapeake City. Unable to find anywhere to leave the boat for the night, Libby called an old friend, who happened to be head of the yacht club’s foundation, who helped make a berth appear. Another old friend picked us up by car and delivered us to our hotel. Andrew's and my room was a massive two-room suite.

We had been very keen to sleep on the boat for the trip, but Libby had flatly stated before we left that she was too old for that. She needed her own room, with her own bathroom. And she wanted us to have that too. We showered, dressed, and drove back to the yacht club for dinner. With the friends who had helped us, we were the only people there, sitting atop the balcony deck overlooking the entrance to Lewes we’d just passed through a few hours earlier. It was a stunning, still evening as the sun dipped.

I was very tired.
The Third Day:
99 Miles

Lewes to Wachapreague
We left shortly after nine, heading south down the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal. At nine miles long, the canal opened in 1913 as part of the inland waterway to Chincoteague, protecting small vessels from the dreaded cape at Henlopen, "a mercurial stretch of sand hills," as described by Elinor DeWire in *Lighthouses of the Mid-Atlantic Coast* (2011). The sand bars of the Hen and Chicken Shoals off Henlopen have caught many a boat, encouraging Cape Henlopen Light to be completed in 1767. Threatened by sand dune erosion for most of its career, the light finally succumbed in 1926.
It was another stunning day—blue skies with not a cloud in sight, nor a breath of wind. We crept along at a very slow speed, the canal only fifty feet wide, and, according to the chart, six feet deep.

Andrew sat up at the bow, exclaiming at the occasional crab or eel that passed under our hull. The tide was way down. I don’t think I ever did see six feet on the depth sounder. And just like de Gast, we ran aground a few times, at less than two feet. A number of times I had to raise the outboard as we slowly puttered along. Traffic has never been heavy on the canal, and today proved no different. Two boats passed us from the south—anxious to clear as close as possible in the narrow width of the canal—and one a short way behind us. The canal is bordered by marshes, occasional stands of trees, and further south a few houses, until it emerges into Rehoboth Bay.

I picked up speed as we followed the green buoys marking the channel down Rehoboth Bay to Bluff Point. The markers split at the point; I made the error of heading east, and at a fair clip immediately ran aground. Backing us off, I turned us around. Everyone else was going through Massey Ditch, and so did we, into Indian River Bay. Circling around a sand bar to the east, the bridge over Indian River Inlet gleamed in the sunlight. I was grateful we were under power, as the churn of the sweeping tide through the inlet would have stopped us in our tracks, and the eddies spin the boat. It was a rocking ride out to the North Atlantic Ocean. The Ocean...
Defying all odds, the Atlantic was flat calm, giving us a fast sixteen-mile ride south, alongside a “lonely, unbroken stretch of sand” to Ocean City. For the moment, gone were the more interesting marshes and creeks; "... the miles-long stretches of high-rise buildings seemed oddly out of place on the otherwise low and tranquil Eastern Shore." Instead of crab pots, we had to dodge speed boats parasailing. Bottlenose dolphins escorted us.
Ocean City Inlet was a surprising hive of activity. Boats of all sizes were speeding every which way. I had to keep my eyes open and concentrate. The inlet was only formed after The Great Hurricane of 1933, separating the "mainland" from Assateague Island. But it wasn’t sea water that forced the cut—pent up flood waters in the coastal bays, from days of rain, burst through a low spot on Ocean City island just south of Ocean City's boardwalk. Ocean City Inlet was born, and the now far easier ocean access changed the face of Ocean City’s commercial fishing industry, and created a recreation one.

We found our way to Micky Fins Bar & Grill Restaurant. We refueled at the dock, and found a berth to tie up for lunch. Here we were to pick up Captain Rick Kellem, an old friend of Libby’s who owns and operates Broadwater Eco Tours out of Wachapreague. Libby was nervous of us heading south without someone who knew those waters like the back of their hands, and had chartered Captain Rick to act as our guide. I was now handing over the helm, and I wasn’t overly happy about it.

We sat down for lunch, and Rick asked me directly what was the purpose of our trip. I explained how we were following Robert de Gast’s voyage as he’d written about in Western Wind Eastern Shore. Rick laughed. “I knew Robert very well when he lived in Wachapreague. I helped him build his house.” I immediately fell in love with Rick, and he was near the best thing to happen to us on our voyage. He stayed on board with us for three days through to Crisfield. He knew every single little place I wanted to visit, every story tied to the landscape, every hidden sand bar, every bird or fish. He was an all-round fabulous chap, and I’m very proud that he’s now a good personal friend. Andrew also loved him. Too, I could now write my log as we traveled (though it made my hand writing hard to read at times), and not have to try and remember everything when tired late at night. I gladly handed the helm over!

We left Ocean City Inlet at two-thirty, heading south a few miles off shore to follow the thirty-seven miles of Assateague Island, the first of the narrow barrier islands leading down to Cape Charles. Looking back, as did de Gast, I was “struck by the contrast between Ocean City behind me, looking like Lower Manhattan, and Assateague Island ahead, deserted and barren on the other side of the inlet.”

The Atlantic was still flat calm, with just a light ocean swell. The Delaware River had been a dark brown; the ocean now a vivid blue. A few sunbathers dotted the sandy shore. Dolphins raced beside us. I could see Menhaden schooling below the surface as we sped on. Just as I dropped my head to fiddle with something on my life jacket, Andrew and Rick cried aloud as a manta ray leaped from the water slightly ahead of us. I missed it. Months later, I still think about missing that manta ray.
When de Gast left Ocean City, he sailed inland behind Assateague down the wide waters of Chincoteague Bay. Rick had advised us against following this route, wary of only three or four feet of water—often less—and poor channel marking. It was still that depth when de Gast sailed, but with a centerboard, he had little to worry about.

At the southern tip of Assateague, we headed inside Chincoteague Inlet. Our destination was Greenbackville, where de Gast tied up on his ninth night. To reach the town, we had to head back north, winding our way up Chincoteague Channel, past Chincoteague town. Under the bridge, we followed the markers up the lower end of Chincoteague Bay. De Gast wrote that “dilapidated... Greenbackville had seen its best years long ago. Wrecks were strewn all over the edge of the tiny harbor... This was a ghost town... The place gave me the creeps.” Nothing much had changed. The wrecks were gone, but it was still dilapidated. New docks had been built up the head of the very small (upside down) L-shaped harbor, but we only saw one person—two fewer than de Gast.

Back we sped to Chincoteague. De Gast spent his tenth night here, tucked just inside Chincoteague Channel. We headed once more out Chincoteague Inlet, passing the odd shaped buildings of NASA’s Wallops Flight Facility. There have been over 16,000 launches from the rocket testing range at Wallops since its founding in 1945.

A bit of an easterly picked up. After Wallops Island we passed Assawoman Island, the Metompkin Islands, and then Cedar Island. At six-thirty we ran into Wachapreague Inlet, wary of the sand banks and their surf. The remains of the steel wreck of the clamming boat Sea Pearl is a poignant reminder of the dangers.

It took us fifteen minutes at speed to snake our way through the narrow channels leading to Wachapreague. Marsh grasses spread as far as the eye could see. In the evening light snowy egrets walked the muddy water’s edge, taking advantage of the low tide. A long-legged willet was also digging in the mud, along with oyster catchers, tri-colored herons, and a small green heron. Enhancing its subdued beauty, a soft purple and pink haze colored the sky. At seven we tied up at Wachapreague’s docks. A low tide made it tricky trying to find a safe place to drop Libby and our gear off. Piles of crab pots were littered around. Tiny crabs scuttled around the muddy banks. There was a very quiet air about the small town. We carried our bags across the road to a cinder brick hotel that had seen better days, but was quite comfortable. “Tomorrow [we] would round Cape Charles and begin the meandering journey back up the Chesapeake Bay.”
The Fourth Day:  
117 Miles

Wachapreague to Onancock Creek  
We’d run the boat fast yesterday. It took 44.83 gallons of fuel to fill the tank at Wachapreague’s fuel dock. Libby joined us and we slipped out from the dock shortly before nine. Once again, another beautiful day promised.

De Gast visited Wachapreague on his twelfth day. He wandered the town for a bit, and then motored in winds gusting thirty miles for an “agonizingly long” time to Horseshoe Lead, just inside Parramore Island. He visited with four guardsmen stationed at the Coast Guard station on the island. In Horseshoe Lead he hunkered down for the night with all 150 feet of anchor line out, weathering rain and hail. “The wind, sometimes up to forty-five knots... whipped the water around us into a froth.” The storm lifted after two hours. He poured himself a glass of whiskey to celebrate emerging unscathed.

On our own way to Horseshoe Lead, Rick excitedly pointed out a loon. We stopped, and watched, and listened. It was the first loon Rick had seen of the season, and he firmly believed that this early sighting portended an early autumn and winter. As we neared, it gave out a nervous tremolo sound. We backed off. Rick explained that loons are the closest relation to the albatross.
We passed the Coast Guard station, newly built in 1995. De Gast’s station had burned to the ground in 1989. We cut the engine and drifted for a bit in Horseshoe Lead. I gazed at Parramore Island’s old maritime forest. The forest had been struck by lightning multiple times, said Rick. Once lighted it can burn for a month or more as the fire gets down into the trees’ roots.

We headed back out Wachapreague Inlet into the Atlantic, going off a couple of miles to skirt Parramore Banks. Off Hog Island bottlenose dolphins cavorted with great leaps, showing off to us and their females. Further offshore, Rick noticed three ships fishing for menhaden, each with their own Cessna airplane circling ahead, spotting for schools of fish. We sped out to them, and drifted for over an hour watching the intricate workings of the industry. From one of the mother ships, Smugglers Point, two aluminum work boats circled with a net, coming into each other ever closer, trapping the fish. The men on the boats worked feverishly, barking orders out to each other, pulling here, yanking there. It looked like back breaking work. Once the net had been hauled in as close as possible, they waited for the mother ship to slowly come over and lay alongside. A long wide hose was dropped into the pooled net, and the fish were all sucked up into the ship’s hold. It was mesmerizing, and reminded me of the bustle of men in Moby Dick, working closely together, each performing their own role as they squeezed the “milk and sperm of human kindness.”

We waved the crew farewell, and once more headed south. Speeding past Hog Island and then Cobb Island we entered Sand Shoal Inlet, into Cobb Bay. Gone now on our voyage was the nearly two days we had experiencing the ocean swell of the Atlantic. We tucked ourselves into the southern tip of Cobb Island, running the bow of the boat on to the sand bank at the head of the still bay. Knowing that we’d be swimming today, we threw off our clothes over our swim gear and dove in. It was glorious, and a welcome treat.
Finally, we were going to have the chance to follow the V. I. P., the Virginia Inside Passage, that de Gast motored inside from Chincoteague to Cape Charles. Following the markers, we sped west along Sand Shoal Channel, the long stretch of Elkins Marsh to our right; a lone brick chimney on Elkins Marsh the only reminder of the glorious past of the Elkins Club Lodge, washed away many years ago.

We headed for the little town of Oyster, where de Gast spent his thirteenth night. Motoring through the narrow entrance we entered the tiny harbor. The large clam boats de Gast had anchored near were nowhere to be seen. I doubt they dock here anymore. The town seemed empty, though there was a small fisheries operation of some sort on the eastern side of the harbor. Rick pointed out the two or three houses that had been moved from Cedar Island to Oyster. The rest of the houses on Cedar Island had been abandoned to the elements, the last house slipping into the sea in 2014. We turned and slowly motored out.

Turning south into The Thorofare, we sped down Mockhorn Channel, following the nicely spaced markers. Marker 232 was the first outside Oyster; when we reached marker 267, the last one on the V. I. P., we would be back on the Chesapeake Bay. Water levels ranged from three feet to thirteen, and once even thirty. Rick pointed out two World War II towers in the distance on Smith Island. To keep an eye out for
enemy shipping, the towers used to have lights atop them. But since these lights made them easy targets, the enemy ships would bomb them. Thus a lone lit pole was erected just south of the towers, and the ships targeted those instead. Far to the east on Cape Charles stood Smith Island Lighthouse, one of the most aesthetic looking structures to be seen in such a remote place.

“Through the Thorofare we went, then down Magothy Bay, to the entrance of Smith Island Bay. With the Lighthouse on Smith Island (not to be confused with Smith Island in the Chesapeake, north of Tangier Island) in view [we] turned at marker 262 and headed southeast for the dredged cut through Cape Charles.”

And there we had our first view of the Chesapeake Bridge. We all let out a “woo hoo!” as we rounded our most southern point, crossing under the eastern span of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, saluting marker 267. (Perhaps mistakenly, de Gast notes marker 268 being the last one on the Virginia Inside Passage; according to our chart, there is no marker 268.)

“I watched the bridge-tunnel, a strange sight to me after the quiet sail down the coast, fade into the distance behind me. Soon I was passing the old Kiptopeke Ferry Terminal, built in 1950, seven and a half miles south of Cape Charles City. A long steel pier had been built here, and nine World War II surplus concrete
ships had been sunk to protect the terminal from the waters of the Bay. The whole scene looked so unattractive that I decided to keep on for Cape Charles . . ."

We could see the ferro-cement hulls of the World War II McCloskey ships from a mile or so away. Unlike de Gast, I thought they were fascinating. They were among two dozen built by McCloskey and Co. in Tampa to haul commodities—sugar, coffee, sulphur—from Caribbean and South American ports. Home now to many a pelican and black back gull, they form two separate break waters of ships grounded end-to-end. We cruised around them, peering through open hulls; iron rebar rusted where cement had eroded away, from years of wave action. The ferry service had ceased in 1964, with the opening of the bridge-tunnel. The ships now protected not Kiptopeke’s ferry terminal, but public fishing wharf.

We headed north to Cape Charles—the town whose name is derived from the Cape Charles we’d motored around ten miles south—arriving at two-thirty for a late lunch at Cape Charles Harbor Bar. Back on the water, we had a terrific fast run north. A following sea and stern wind helped push us along. Rick gave Andrew a lesson at the wheel on keeping a straight compass course. It was a magical afternoon.
“At four I entered Onancock Creek.” We arrived at five-thirty. It was de Gast’s fifteenth day. One of the earliest magazine articles about the Eastern Shore (in *Scribner’s*, March 1872) had this to say about Onancock: “The gem of the Eastern Shore is the harbor of Onancock, a loop or skein of salt coves widening up betwixt straits of green mounds and golden bluffs, and terminating at an exquisite landing, where several creeks pour into the estates of Virginia planters.”

We motored slowly up to the wharf, having failed to reach the dock master via VHF channel 16. De Gast noted that the landing was “not so exquisite a hundred years later;” we thought it was delightful. Ruth, Onancock’s harbor master waved us in. She’d not turned her VHF back to channel 16 after chatting with another boat on channel 68. We explained that we were looking for fuel and a place to dock the boat for the night. Nothing was too much trouble. She was employed as a seasonal, and had started her harbor master position in April. She was hoping to stay on. The local mayor wanted to have a word with her, and she hoped that it would be good news. We wished her luck. Onancock deserved her. We refueled; 55.24 gallons from 117 miles, with a running time of just over seven hours. It had been a long day, and we were tired. We secured the boat and waited only a few minutes for our ride; Gary picked us up at the dock. We threw gear bags in the back of the car, booked ourselves in at the Charlotte Hotel & Restaurant for the night, had quick showers, and met downstairs for dinner. Andrew was looking for some “me time.” He happily had pizza up in our room, camped out with a mattress on the floor, with a TV and Cartoon Network.

While I was getting ready for dinner, he asked me if it was fun being a parent?
The Fifth Day: 
49 Miles

Onancock Creek to Tangier
We were downstairs a bit after seven. Libby, Andrew and I walked part of the town, very pretty, with lots of galleries, a sure sign of gentrification, yet no one around. We found Rick and had a quick snack in the local bakery while waiting for our hotel’s breakfast to open at eight. Rick pointed out that the bakery was locally famous; there was already a crowd of four or five people waiting for it to open. One was a local real estate agent with a gravelly smoker’s voice, who told us how it used to be in Onancock; “Everybody’s gotta be someplace.” Commerce used to be very busy. Every tide, twice a day, washed new artifacts in along the shoreline, first contact peoples and later. We mentioned we were from St. Michaels: “Then you’re slumming it.”
Gary drove us back to the wharf in a Mini Cooper, much to Andrew’s delight. Two young chaps were sitting on a boat moored beside us. They were the ferry service to Tangier Island. Rick asked them what the weather had been like when they’d run over earlier in the morning. One of them wobbled his hand to show a bit lumpy.

We left shortly after nine. Onancock Creek is truly a beautiful setting. Three sloops were anchored around the point; no one stirred aboard.

The seven- to eight-mile trip to Tangier was just fine—a little lumpy on the stern quarter, with a light sou’esterly. Ever since arriving on the Eastern Shore, I have always wanted to visit Tangier Island, and this was it. We weren’t going to stay long—just enough time for Libby to get a feel for the place. Andrew and I were going to drop Libby and Rick off in Crisfield, and then just the two of us return to Tangier for the night. The four of us piled into an eight-seater golf cart for a quick tour of the island. Sue charged us $5 a person, plus tip to help with her children’s education. She was very interesting, but delivered her stories in a deadpan tourist guide voice, which was such a contrast when interrupted with a question and then answering in her normal voice. I gave an internal smile when she said that Tangier had been “discovered” by Captain John Smith.
We headed back to the mainland to Crisfield, the town’s high rises just in sight nor’east across Tangier Sound. The wind dropped right out, leaving a clear brilliantly blue day. It was hot. After a lunch of excellent cream of crab soup at the Water’s Edge Café, we heaved Libby and Rick’s gear off the boat and into the boot of her car service. Rick would be dropped off first in Ocean City, where he’d left his car, and Libby would head back home to Claiborne, a few miles south of St. Michaels. She needed a rest. Hopefully, we’d pick her up a few days later further up the Eastern Shore. We sadly waved goodbye, and they were gone.

It felt great to have sole responsibility, and I was touched that Libby had the confidence in me. Andrew and I put our life jackets back on, threw off the lines and we motored out of Somers Cove on to the Little Annemessex River, leaving Crisfield behind us. De Gast stayed in Crisfield in his eighteenth night. He had planned to spend the night just north of the town, in Daugherty Creek, but attacked by swarms of mosquitoes, he was forced back to the safety of Somers Cove.
We retraced our steps to Tangier Island, clear in the distance. Tangier Sound was now glassy. There was no wind whatsoever, and it was very hot. I cut the engine a mile or so from Tangier so we could dangle our legs over the side to cool off a bit. Andrew wasn’t brave enough to skinny dip.

Making the run into the entrance of Tangier was again a delight. Crab shanties on stilts line the “main street” into town, some falling apart, many still being worked, where watermen store their crabbing supplies, and monitor crabs as they shed their hard shells to become soft-shell. Piles of colorful crab pots were stacked atop jetties. A buyboat was tied up, looking as though it was being worked on. We tied up at the piles Rick had earlier recommended, and then retied again to make sure I had lines on the right piles.

It was a hot, slow walk up the narrow lanes to Hilda Crockett’s Chesapeake House Bed & Breakfast—“featured on The Today Show”—built in 1939 and open late April to mid-October. De Gast didn’t stay the night on Tangier, but he visited Chesapeake House: “At Chesapeake House, the only hotel on the island, I was given permission to take a shower. It cost a dollar, which seemed a reasonable price to pay for so rare a pleasure.” As soon as we stepped into our upstairs room, I was happy that we were paying much, much more than a dollar, for the air conditioning alone. We looked into the mirror together. Both of our faces were bright red. I took a photo from the mirror’s reflection to make the point. It was damnably hot.

We would have eaten in the B&B’s dining room, but their last seating was at five, and it was now five-thirty. I too had enjoyed the rare pleasure of a shower. We walked down the narrow street back to the dock and found a restaurant still open. Three local couples and a solo tourist were dining. We couldn’t help but overhear their conversation; lunch numbers had been slow today, the kids were heading back to school, and the season’s slowly winding down, though I hate to admit it. On asking where we were from, our server laughed. She and her husband had honeymooned in St. Michaels. She rattled off the names of all the local restaurants they’d enjoyed—Ava’s was the best, for its pizza; Gina’s; Blackthorn Irish Pub—they’d had a great time. And they had loved the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum—I smiled to myself. There she had fallen once again in love with her newly married husband when he had released to the Miles River a soft shell crab from the museum’s eel net, before the shell would harden and the poor creature wouldn’t be able to escape.

Andrew had been begging ever since we’d arrived back on Tangier, could we please rent our own golf cart and explore the island? (And have an ice cream.) So we did, for an hour, to return by seven. We drove over narrow wooden bridges spanning marshes and tidal creeks; up and down every narrow lane—it’s a bit hard to call them streets—multiple times, driving past the same folks multiple times, especially two older women with lovely smiles that broadened each time—the many times—we passed each other.
The recycling center on the northwestern corner of the island had the best sunset in town. Ignoring the piles of abandoned washing machines, dryers, bikes, scooters, golf carts and other sundry junk—accompanied by the slight stench of rubbish—and mosquitoes—we watched the most stunning setting sky of our voyage.
Religious motifs are numerous. At the southern end a large cross stands amidst the marsh grass, with “Christ is Life” engraved on it, perfectly reflected in the creek in the still of the evening. It’s also a dry island—one can’t find a drink anywhere—at least I couldn’t.

Later that evening I lay on my bed and worked on my log, jotting down our memories of Tangier Island: cats—hundreds of them—each porch we passed seemed to have seven or eight or more lazily basking in the heat. Only women mow the lawns; and the lawn mowers, once finished with, sit wherever the last bit was mowed. Children on bikes everywhere, or riding small electric scooters, or golf carts.
Golf carts, everywhere, are the preferred mode of transport. De Gast noticed bicycles and motorbikes—we only saw one motorbike, and for adults the golf cart has replaced the bicycle. I hardly saw any young men, unless they were out crabbing?

I'm now dozing and I wake to find my pen running slowly down the page. Andrew is fast asleep in the bed beside me. He looks gorgeous. This is when it’s fun being a parent. I turn out the light.
The Sixth Day:
10.3 Miles

Tangier Island to Smith Island
Just after seven we walked across “the road” to the other half of the B&B, which houses additional bedrooms upstairs, and the kitchen and dining room downstairs. Already seated family style was Ron Herring and his wife. They’d arrived at the dock yesterday in their boat the same time we had; as well as the chap who had been eating dinner alone in the same restaurant we were in last night. I was impressed with how much scrambled eggs and bacon they could all consume, and while talking. The single chap left and came back to show me a small watercolor he’d recently painted of the Small Boat Shed at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

We packed our bags and left them downstairs in the lounge. I wanted to walk the two-mile sandy point at the southern end of the island. Andrew reluctantly tagged along. It was blowing hard, a twenty-knot easterly churning up Tangier Sound. We were grateful for the wind as they helped keep the green back flies off, but biting whenever they could. Lots of small blue crabs swam off the shore of the beach. The most southern tip was packed with pelicans and black back gulls. The remains of a steel wreck lay just off the beach inside Cod Harbor. It looked as though it could have been a dredge.

We walked back to our B&B against the wind, collected our bags, and walked the half-mile or so back to the boat. The stiff breeze pinning the boat in, I was rather proud of myself for using a spring line to back ourselves out from the piles with no drama.

It was a wet but fun ride the ten miles to Smith Island in a now fifteen knot easterly. Smith Island lies in Maryland waters, and Tangier in Virginia—we’d again crossed another state line, the sixth and last on our voyage. Like Tangier, Smith Island is not just one island, but a series of small islands or marshes, some connected, many not.
Up the eastern side of the island we navigated Big Thorofare, sweeping our way for another mile into Ewell, one of three small inhabited locations, the others being Rhodes Point and Tylerton. We first tied up at the larger of the docks, in front of the Bayside Inn. Inside, I asked Melanie where we could dock overnight, and find a bed. She made three calls to find Michelle, who for $200 could rent us the last place on Smith available, a small fully furnished house. It was still far too hot to sleep on the boat. Andrew looked beseechingly at me. She’d be around to pick us up, after we’d had lunch. I moved the boat to Captain Steven’s dock, as recommended by Rick. If he wasn’t around, you could leave one dollar per foot of boat in the honesty jar. John picked us up in a golf cart, and in a few minutes dropped us off at a very smart two-bedroom house, with bikes. We biked around town—usual street size rather than the
alley ways of Tangier. It seemed much more open than Tangier—larger property sections—and even though golf carts were popular, there were more cars.
Andrew cried hot and headed home. I set off the couple of miles south to Rhodes Point. At the end of the empty road, at Marsh Marina, two chaps with very strong Tangier accents were waiting for the owner of the yard to arrive by boat from Tylerton. They’d just arrived via skiff from Tangier to have the boat pulled out for repairs via the only travel lift around. We had a good chat—each enjoying the other’s accent. Six deadrise boats sat chocked on the hardstand. Sweeps of marsh grass marked the lagoons of Shanks Creek and West Creek, and their soft yellows and greens swayed as the easterly played over them. As Tom Horton notes, “A marsh-clad island is a place alive.” It was alive, and very peaceful. And there were green back flies enjoying it with me.

I biked back to find Andrew in a bit of a tizz. He couldn’t find me and had searched everywhere. He’d even thrown a Frisbee up in the air to see if I’d see it.

I had a shower, and not being able to keep my eyes open, asked Andrew to wake me shortly before five for dinner. The Bayside Inn Carryout & Ice Cream Shop closed at four for dinner, so we biked back to the Bayside Restaurant, which closed much later, at five. The place was packed with locals on a Saturday evening. The kitchen was busy. While we waited for our order, I chatted again with Melanie. She’d lived on Smith Island all her life—thirty-five years—never feeling the need to move. Her
father had died, and her mother recently survived septicemia. Living in a mortgage-free house, she worked forty-six plus hours a week—today was going to be eleven—and had no interest in marrying or having children.

We finished a great home-cooked meal with a slice of world famous, eight layer, Smith Island Cake for dessert; indeed, the State Dessert of Maryland. After all the families had finished their dinner, I heard a burst of applause. Melanie said that they always ask the chef to come out and be thanked. It felt like a great community. Though also a dry island.

Nathan, just a few years older than Andrew, visited our table and asked if it was our first time on Smith. Andrew took Nathan to show him the boat. I saw them bike off together. Melanie said not to worry, they’ll be perfectly safe, the entire island would be on the look out. Nathan returned later with his souped-up golf cart, and they were again gone. Back at the house, in the pitch dark, Andrew popped in soon after eight to check in, and was gone again until after nine, returning with Nathan. I kicked Nathan out near ten, trying to keep my eyes open.
The Seventh Day: 131 Miles

Smith Island to Cambridge
I was up at six-fifty, courtesy of music from Andrew’s tablet. We made instant porridge for breakfast, and walked with our gear the short distance to the dock; stowed our gear away, donned life jackets, slipped our lines, and were off. A nor’easterly kicked up a bit of chop, but quickly died down. Speeding north up Tangier Sound, we passed Deal Island to starboard, and Bloodsworth Island to port. Around Haines Point we headed up the Wicomico River, to find Webster Cove. De Gast had stayed the night there on his nineteenth day. Though clearly marked on the chart, our Webster Cove did not in any way resemble the description given by de Gast. I’m now wondering whether he meant Wicomico Creek, a little further up.

We sped back out the Wicomico River, heading east to Hooper Strait, between Bloodsworth Island to the south and Fishing Bay and Bishops Head Marsh to the north. We were now in large open expanses of dark water, and without easy land in sight spent careful time with charts, GPS (once again working) and compass to ensure we were on the right heading. On his twentieth day, de Gast had turned north-west and sailed up the Honga River. According to my charts the only access out at the top of the river was marked as two feet or less. I didn’t want to risk it. At the Bayside Restaurant the night before I had asked a couple of the older locals whether they knew this part of the Bay, and could they recommend either going up the Honga or staying outside west of Hooper Islands. With their lyrical Smith Island accents they laughed that it had been years since they’d been up thataway, and we should probably stay west. So we did.

I was regularly flicking my eyes over the fuel gauge. We’d last filled the tanks in Onancock, some miles back, and I hadn’t refilled at Tangier or Smith. I would have to find a fuel dock fairly soon.

We sped north past Taylors Island, and then James Island. At the mouth of the Little Choptank River, we cut the engines and drifted. I made sandwiches, and tried to
phone Slaughter Marina, on Slaughter Creek, to see if their fuel dock would be open on a Sunday afternoon. After three calls I finally reached the dock master. I could come on in, but there was a watermen’s boat docking contest going on and the fuel dock wouldn’t be open until four. It was just before noon. We decided to follow de Gast’s lead on his twenty-first day—not just by eking out his fuel—but by exploring the creeks fanning off the Little Choptank. I judged we could do that, and have just enough fuel to return to Slaughter Creek. We spent part of the afternoon “aimlessly [motoring] the many creeks. Some I entered, some I sailed past: Slaughter, Fishing, Church, Gray, Beckwith, Phillips, Hudson, Brooks, Lee, Parsons, all within a few miles of each other.” Up Beckwith, on a small island in the middle of the creek, was a house and square barn. The barn was painted white on the bottom half, and red on the top. Solomons Cove was tiny and secluded, Fishing Creek winded for some miles. The exploration was delightful. Except for that fuel gauge.

Down to one bar on the gauge I turned us around and headed back to Slaughter Creek. The watermen’s boat docking competition was in full swing. We tied up outside the crowded piles and wandered over to watch the fun. It was almost miserably hot. We waited three long hours.

One of the competitors was Barney Kastel and his son Ryan, who had brought their boat down from St. Michaels. I knew Barney well. He was pleased to see me, and I a
familiar face. Once the competition was over at four, I maneuvered the boat into the only space Barney could help find, and filled our tanks, watermen holding mugs of beer, in good spirits, standing around. The pump ran for some time—76.8 gallons—we’d been cutting it fine.

We headed back out with the watermen, they heading home to work the next day, south to Deal Island or Tangier, or north like us to Cambridge or St. Michaels. They left us in their noisy wake. We had a great run past Hills Point Neck, Trippe Bay, and around the point into the Choptank River. I was not ready for the vast water of the Choptank. It took another twelve miles to reach Cambridge, with faster boats passing us at the end of their weekend.

Curling around Hambrooks Bar, the familiar bridge into Cambridge lay ahead. At six-thirty we slowly motored into the yacht basin, too late to contact the dock master. We tied up at one of the many open berths, and I reckoned I could square us away with the dock master the next morning. Hungry, Andrew and I walked ten minutes up the stone paved road to a gastro pub, whose barman mixed one of the best Cosmopolitans ever, and served an excellent meal. I even let Andrew have a soft drink.

We walked back hand-in-hand in the dark. Emptying the cabin of all our gear into the cockpit, we laid out our fleece blankets, and fell fast asleep.
Cambridge to St. Michaels
The first crabbing boat leaving the basin woke me at three-thirty; the second at four-thirty. After seven we chatted with the young chap across from us on a house boat. He and his wife had sold their house and most of their belongings, bought the boat and were living full time in the basin. He had just dropped his wife off at work, and was taking the day off himself. He pointed to a large blue heron, balancing on a line just across from us. The heron welcomes him every morning. Two smaller green necked herons perched on a line just beside us. It was a glorious morning. No mosquitoes, no green backed flies. Our new friend gave us the combination for the toilets, which we gladly used. Back at the boat, he told us that during the night someone had stolen the baited crab lines belonging to the waterman with the deadrise tied up closest to the entrance of our dock. I went and had a chat with him. He was waiting for family to bring him another set, but each set took three hours to bait.

I visited the dock master’s office, in the replica screw-pile lighthouse at the entrance to the yacht basin, and paid our dues. He knew just what boat we were off.

My wife dropped Libby off around ten. It’s only a twenty-six-mile drive from St. Michaels to Cambridge, and Libby very much wanted to complete the voyage with us.

De Gast spent his twenty-first night in Sawmill Cove, up La Trappe Creek, off the Choptank just north of Cambridge. It was our first visit for the morning. We too motored in as far as we could, not quite wanting to touch bottom as de Gast did. It
was completely secluded and very still.

We turned around, out the Choptank, around Bachelor Point into the Tred Avon River. Past the masts of boats anchored and in marinas, and 1700 to 1800’s homes of Oxford, “sitting on the shore with its feet in the water,” we motored another four to five miles up to Easton (only a nine-mile drive from our home). De Gast got nearly as far as Easton, and like us, headed back out the Tred Avon.

He sailed over to Dun Cove, up Harris Creek, for the night, tucked away in the secure cove, just north of Knapps Narrows. We poked our heads in Dun Cove. Back south again, we motored the few miles to Knapps Narrows, which separates Tilghman Island from the mainland. The Narrows is about nine thousand feet long, and only seventy-five feet wide. Its depth is now a problem, at five feet or less, sometimes just two at the western end, with the necessary dredging being somehow delayed by the Army Corps of Engineers: the locals are not happy. The bridge is regarded as the busiest drawbridge in the US; it opens approximately 12,000 times a year, more often than most East Coast bridges.

The bridge is personally dear to me. The original, constructed in 1935, was moved in 1995 to mark the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.
Safely through the Narrows into Eastern Bay, we were on our last few miles home. Up Eastern Bay in almost flat calm conditions, we ran for Tilghman Point. Around that we were back on the Miles River, and too soon slowly motoring back into St. Michaels Harbor, past the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Some of my boatyard staff were working on our skipjack, *Rosie Parks*. “You made it back then,” they said with a wave.
Robert de Gast's 24 Days

- The First Day: Chesapeake Bay to Emery Creek
- The Second Day: Emory Creek to Worton Creek
- The Third Day: Worton Creek to Turner Creek
- The Fourth Day: Turner Creek to Chesapeake & Delaware Canal
- The Fifth Day: Chesapeake & Delaware Canal to Smyrna River
- The Sixth Day: Smyrna River to Roosevelt Inlet
- The Seventh Day: Roosevelt Inlet to Indian River Inlet
- The Eighth Day: Indian River Inlet to Ocean City Inlet
- The Ninth Day: Ocean City Inlet to Greenbackville Harbor
- The Tenth Day: Greenbackville Harbor to Chincoteague Channel
- The Eleventh Day: Chincoteague Channel to Folly Creek
- The Twelfth Day: Folly Creek to Horseshoe Lead
- The Thirteenth Day: Horseshoe Lead to Oyster Harbor
- The Fourteenth Day: Oyster Harbor to Kings Creek
- The Fifteenth Day: Kings Creek to Onancock Creek
- The Sixteenth Day: Onancock to Creek to Pocomoke River
- The Seventeenth Day: Pocomoke River
- The Eighteenth Day: Pocomoke River to Somers Cove
- The Nineteenth Day: Somers Cove to Webster Cove
- The Twentieth Day: Webster Cove to Honga River
- The Twenty-first Day: Honga River to Sawmill Cove
- The Twenty-second Day: Sawmill Cove to Dun Cove
- The Twenty-third Day: Dun Cove to Wye River
- The Twenty-fourth Day: Wye River to Chesapeake Bay
**Introduction:**

*The Eastern Shore*

As every Marylander is aware, “the Eastern Shore” is a peninsula the lies between the Chesapeake Bay to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Hulbert Footner writes, “More than three hundred years ago, the first white settlers in Virginia and Maryland established themselves on the western shore of the bay, and naturally they called the land on the other side the ‘Eastern Shore.’ To them no further designation was required, and it has been the Eastern Shore ever since” (5). Captain John Smith even began his account of his exploration of the Chesapeake in 1608 with the entry, “we crossed the bay to the eastern shore” (qtd. in de Gast 1975 4). John Wennersten notes that “Long before there was a United States, there was an Eastern Shore” (2009 ix).

The Eastern Shore includes almost all the little state of Delaware, with nine counties of Maryland, and two of Virginia; thus, the Eastern Shore is also known as the Delmarva peninsula, or just Delmarva. It is about 136 miles long, seventy miles wide at the shoulder, and twelve miles at its narrowest. If you take the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal into account, Delmarva is technically an island, of 5,454 square miles. And with the wind, storms, and tides the Eastern Shore experiences, one could argue that those measurements are decreasing substantially each year— islands are known to disappear, marshes are rapidly being filled—its shape is constantly changing.¹

¹ See Ron Cassie for a very salutary warning.
The Eastern Shore still bears the aspect of a great bank or shoal risen from the sea; in *Tales of Old Maryland*, John H. K. Shannahan calls the Eastern Shore a “sand-bar” (qtd. in de Gast 1975 5). Below the Choptank River it is as flat as a pancake, never more than fifteen feet above sea level, except for the low watershed near the ocean side, where it rises to a height of forty feet. As one travels up the Shore, the land rises by infinitesimal degrees until we find the Sassafras flowing through a plain which averages eighty feet elevation. “There is a gentle roll to this country” (Footner 7).

Water is omnipresent—at four thousand miles, the Chesapeake Bay’s shoreline is longer than the entire United States’ West Coast. Too, there are no less than nineteen navigable rivers, and the Bay boasts the most tributaries of any other body of water in the United States—one hundred and fifty. Winds and tides have shaped a shoreline fantastic in the number of its islands, rivers, bays, creeks, sounds and straits. In a boat one could spend the weekends of a lifetime in exploring that sand-bar’s convolutions.

It has been argued that “No body of water in the United States has played a more important role in shaping the nation than has the Chesapeake” (Clarke np). While Jamestown, Historic St. Mary’s City, Annapolis, Baltimore and Washington D.C.—cities known for their “place” in the United States’ history—sit either direct on the western shore of the Bay or its western tributaries, the Eastern Shore still boasts many of the historical homes that stand as a testament to the founding and development of a nation and its people. Robert Clarke notes that “America was born and came of age along the Bay’s waterway, and the fabric of its history

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2 I could not find the reference in *Tales of Old Maryland*.
still recorded in the plantation homes, forts, churches, commercial buildings, boats, historic neighborhoods, lighthouses and other structures dotting its waterways” (np).

The Eastern Shore was—and in some respects still is—a garden, bountiful of food from land and sea: in his collection of tales, Shannahan wryly observes that “There are many who claim that the Eastern Shore of Maryland is the site of the original Garden of Eden” (43). The Eastern Shore used to be a fruit and vegetable growing powerhouse; now, large-scale poultry production is the exclusive agricultural engine. For centuries fish and shell fish abounded: at its peak in the mid-1800s, over twenty million bushels of oysters were being taken from the Bay each year; current farming is at one percent of that.

To farm all those oysters over a century ago, fleets of graceful skipjacks, and a few

bugeyes, could be seen hauling oysters all winter long, finally becoming the last working sailing fleet in the nation. With the decline of oysters in the latter half of the twentieth century, fewer and fewer of these old boats could be found. By the 1980s, there were only about two dozen skipjacks at work on the Chesapeake, all in Maryland. Today, there are only a handful of skipjacks still dredging for oysters, and the last sailing bugeye (in the world)—*Edna E. Lockwood* (previous page), built in 1889—is currently undergoing restoration at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, in St. Michaels, Maryland.³

In the second half of this project, I am going to explore the concept of the Eastern Shore as a “space,” while recognizing that the Eastern Shore becomes a “place” when it becomes familiar, when it’s been explored and recorded—through photography and stories. Or, as photographic culture scholar Liz Wells notes, “Naming turns space into place” (3); thus, the named Eastern Shore becomes a “place.”

Methods

This project has two parts. The second section has three areas of research: defining the concept of “place”; examining how sense of place can be reflected and represented through photography and stories; and defining sense of place as explored through the personal narratives and photographs of eight voyagers who, from the 1880s, sailed the Eastern Shore. In my role at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, I was fortunate to discover the personal

³ [www.ednalockwood.org](http://www.ednalockwood.org)
narratives and photographs of these eight voyagers who, from the 1880s, have sailed the Eastern Shore. It was reading these narratives that helped me decide upon the overall subject matter for this project—how could the Eastern Shore’s sense of place be defined through their eyes and experiences? And then I discovered Robert de Gast’s book *Western Wind, Eastern Shore: A Sailing Cruise around the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia* (1975). The ability of de Gast to evoke sense of place through his stunning black-and-white photography and narrative was captivating to me. Without discovering his book, I may not have been driven to follow in his wake, which culminated in my own personal essay, the first and primary part of this project, which explores sense of place in relation to the Eastern Shore. This book by Robert de Gast is a written and photographic reflection of his sailing circumnavigation of Delmarva peninsula in 1973; my essay is a personal reflection on sense of place from a voyage I took in August 2016, following de Gast’s route, accompanied with my own photographs.

Through this endeavor, I explore the role of photography and the personal narrative in evoking place. Both are forms of recording experience: the word *photography* is from two Greek words *phos*, meaning *light*, and *graphos*, meaning *written*. Both are means of communication: photography, for example, can convey emotions faster than storytelling. Both photography and the personal narrative are tools for recording facets of sense of place. Through my examination of other narratives related to place—in this case, a particular place, the Eastern Shore—I was able to discover a personal sense of place on the Eastern Shore. What I discovered is that sense of place cannot be easily defined except through being conscious of
one’s experiences as one inhabits or moves through a range of natural, built and social environments. Putting myself on a boat, with particular companions, on a planned route, provided me with a range of such experiences, a narrative for making sense of them, and the focus necessary for that consciousness. Even though I am not a native of the Eastern Shore, my experiences here as I moved through my voyage helped create a sense of place that continues to inform my identity, and develop more of a sense of belonging to my new home. By undertaking my own exploration of the Eastern Shore, I found I could identify with the other personal narratives I reviewed, as well as contribute to the exploration of the concept of place with my own personal narrative. I am particularly proud that the central focus of this project, my personal essay with accompanying photographs, is online at https://robertdegastschesapeake.org/. It is one of two websites devoted to supporting a major new exhibition originated by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, Robert de Gast’s Chesapeake, opening May 12, 2017, at CBMM.
Chapter One:
Defining the concept of place

Given the fact that place is everywhere all the time—quite ubiquitous in nature—it can be problematic that there are so many varied definitions when discussing place. Though well researched and written about in academic works, place is not a definitive word within academic terminology. As the contemporary humanist geographer, Tim Cresswell notes, “It can be evoked in so many disparate ways because it is a word wrapped in common sense . . . Place, then is both simple (and that is part of its appeal) and complicated” (6).

A great deal of the scholarly literature attempts to define the concept of place. One of the first commentaries to reflect on “place” was an influential report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Geography of the National Academy of Sciences (1965). The report states that:

Little is known as yet about what we earlier called the “sense of place” in man. Its secrets are still locked from us in our inadequate knowledge of nervous systems. Someday, when the study of nervous systems has advanced sufficiently, a startling and perhaps revolutionary new input may reach geographical study in a full descriptive analysis of the sense of place. (67)

The report recognized sense of place as “a compound of a sense of territoriality, physical direction, and distance, [that] is very deeply ingrained in the human race” (7). It was largely in reaction to this report—which according to its detractors reflected the post-positivist and objective assumptions of the time—that humanistic geography developed during the 1970s to
1990s. Edward Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan, and John Agnew are widely cited as the key leaders in this movement, which held a sense of place to be an inseparable aspect of human nature, and qualitative in character. Reaction to the report continues to this day: landscape architects Kyle Beidler and Julia Morrison scathingly respond that it has been this “same mindset that has continued to allow an easy objective measure of physical components to triumph over the less measurable, emotional, and cultural ties to place” (206).

Edward Relph is a phenomenologically oriented humanistic geographer who values authenticity and the particularity of specific places. Cresswell describes Relph’s book *Place and Placelessness* as “one of the classic humanistic accounts of place” (197). Relph builds on what he describes as our practical knowledge of places—the everyday and mundane fact of our knowing where to enact our lives. But location is not a necessary or sufficient condition of place; in the deeper sense, it need not have a fixed location—say, Robert de Gast’s boat *Slick Ca’m*, in which he circumnavigated the Eastern Shore, is a self-contained space, even though constantly changing in location. To explain the deeper importance of place to human existence and experience, Relph returns to phenomenology, whereas the “essence” of space comes not from location or experience, but in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence—that to be human is to be “in place.” Relph links the concept of place to the notion of “authenticity.”

The work of the Chinese-US geographer Yi-Fu Tuan had an enormous impact on the history of human geography and, more specifically, the development of the notion of place.
Tuan argues that we get to know the world through places via human perception and experience. He defines place through a comparison with space, and, in fact, the ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. In his groundbreaking study, *Space and place: The perspective of experience* (1977), Tuan is oft-quoted in profoundly helping to define the relationship between the two:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value . . . The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into space. (1977, 6)

Place is also a type of object: places and objects define space. Place is whatever stable object catches our attention.

The political geographer John Agnew outlines a slightly different perspective in social science on the concept of place, offering three fundamental aspects of place as a “meaningful location;” location, locale and sense of place. All places have a “location,” with fixed geographical coordinates—“here” or “there”—while we also need to recognize that places are not always stationary (e.g., a ship). “Locale” relates to the material setting for social relations—the actual shape of place within which people conduct their lives. Places almost always have a concrete form. As well as being located and having a material visual form, places must have some relationship to humans and the human capacity to produce and consume meaning. By
“sense of place,” he means the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place—the local “structure of feeling”—yet we need to take into account that all three need to be complementary. I believe that Agnew’s three-part definition of place certainly accounts for most examples of place.

Following Relph, Tuan, and Agnew’s writings, the study of place shifted in the twenty-first century—away from the physical and social environment as the primary dimensions in the development of a sense of place—to a more recent theory that social interaction and time have a greater influence in an individual’s sense of place, through which theoretical models have attempted to identify distinct and quantifiable dimensions of a sense of place.

To illustrate this direction, Kyle Beidler and Julia Morrison (2016) argue that current theory regarding sense of place can be organized into an overlapping four-dimensional model involving the self, the environment, social interaction, and time. But, they argue, this viewpoint can create problems for planners and designers who should look beyond the physical dimension and be aware that individual interpretations, environmental understandings, sociocultural encounters, and temporal experiences are ultimately intertwined in the transformation of space into place. They therefore define place as the overarching transformation of space into place.

More recently, there has been a growing interest in essay writing, particularly of the personal narrative, in exploring the concept of place. Ingrid Horrocks and Cherie Lacey, professors in English, and Media Studies, at Victoria University, Wellington, respectively, have coined the phrase “place-thinking” to illustrate this new trend, in their publication
*Extraordinary Anywhere* (2016). They believe that this is the first book to re-imagine the idea of place in a collection of personal essays. With specific reference to New Zealand, they argue that historically and invariably the country has been defined “predominantly by its natural landscapes and environment” (10). (As we will see in Chapter Two, this has also been the case in both Britain and the United States.) Yet, Horrocks and Lacey pertinently remind us—a point often forgotten—that:

Most of us now live and work in cities and towns, and these are the places in which many of our most formative experiences occur. Landscape does not necessarily offer the key to our identities; nor is the landscape always the most useful background against which to think about what it means to live here. (10)

Accordingly, many of the essays in *Extraordinary Anywhere* are based in cities and towns in New Zealand, and offer personal stories of engagement with place. In reviewing *Extraordinary Anywhere*, writer Pat White believes that the “personal essays [in *Extraordinary Anywhere*] are important because each of them develops a story of inhabiting a place. How do any of us belong anywhere if we are unable to identify with the stories we tell each other? (np).

In other contemporary research, the study of place takes more of a data-driven approach. Per Gustafson (2001), Researcher at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research at Uppsala University, Sweden, maps meaning to place based on interviews with fourteen people who were asked about places that were important to them, and from those interviews identifies three main themes, of self, environment, and others. “Self” includes an individual’s *life path, emotions, self-identity, and activity*. “Environment” takes in the *physical features of*
the place and its *institutions* and *events*. Finally, “other people (others)” comprises their *characteristics* and *behavior*. Further factors such as *social relations* and *atmosphere* belong to the relationship among these dimensions. Gustafson’s work has been criticized as being too elaborate and vague, while also being based on long term exposure to places (Turner and Turner⁴).

More recently, humanist geographer Tim Cresswell notes that place is a “contested concept,” and thus the “subject of decades of debate in human geography as well as philosophy, planning, architecture, and any number of other disciplines” (19). I offer the current controversy over the path of the Dakota Access Pipeline as a prime example: members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota see the pipeline as interfering with their ancestral lands and water rights—their inherent sense of “historical place” and as a way of being-in-the-world—while Energy Transfers Partners, the developers of the pipeline, see the land the pipeline runs over as land that acts as merely access—almost “placeless.” This is not to say that Energy Transfers Partners has no concept of “place”—this merely confirms that “sense of place” encompasses a myriad of meanings.

Interestingly, Energy Transfers Partners has another potentially controversial pipeline project underway, the Trans-Pecos pipeline, a 143-mile project to carry natural gas from western Texas’ Permian Basin across the border into Mexico. David Keller, an archaeologist at Sul Ross State University’s Center for Big Bend Studies, states that Big Bend is “a sacred

⁴ The Turners’ focus of research is on recreating real places using virtual reality technology.
landscape . . . It truly is the last best place in Texas. When you destroy that landscape, you lose that sense of place” (Malewitz np).

Cary de Wit, Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, reinforces this political perspective on “sense of place.” Recognizing that place is inherently intangible, de Wit defines sense of place “as the human experience of place in all its dimensions: physical, social, psychological, intellectual, and emotional” (121). But it also includes the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes held toward a place, “as well as residents' conscious and unconscious attachments to place, their feelings about local political and social issues, and their attitudes and feelings toward other places” (121). Events, policies, or decisions that impact that intangible sense of place can result in very tangible political, social, and economic ramifications. I believe that this concept explains the emotional response to the Dakota Access Pipeline. De Wit quotes another good example of this relationship with the angry, passionate, and sometimes violent response High Plains residents had to the 1987 Buffalo Commons proposal, because its premise conflicted with their deep sense of identity with place (134).

Even considering the amount of debate over “place”—as shown by the discussion above—and the idea that the concept of place “pops up everywhere,” Cresswell believes that “there has been very little considered understanding of what the word “place” means” (6,1). Even so, let me summarize forty to fifty years of scholarship related to defining place. The study of place has been the subject of multiple disciplines, ranging from geography and planning, to

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5 See Popper and Popper.
health informatics, sociology, and psychology, to name but a few. Yet there is a critical consensus that describes places as spatial locations that have been given meaning by human experience; sense of place, therefore, extends beyond the physical attributes of a given location. In the context of this project, I consider place to be one's perception of a location as informed by one's sociocultural views, and personal identity and experiences. Accordingly, places are formed through the reoccurrence of experiences and activities—of individuals or groups—at certain locations; thus, these locations become an experiential construct. Nevertheless, with changes in urban dynamics, sociocultural perceptions, or significant events, the concept of place itself remains rather elusive and is constantly evolving.

How does this scholarship help us relate to defining place in relation to the Eastern Shore? I would argue that the Eastern Shore is definitively a “space,” but it becomes a “place” when it becomes familiar, when it’s been explored and recorded, as I write about in Chapter Three, and in my personal essay. We can also relate this concept to a definitive piece of writing from Yi-Fu Tuan (1977):

> How long does it take to know a place? Abstract knowledge about a place can be acquired in short order if one is diligent. The visual quality of an environment is quickly tallied if one has the artist’s eye. But the “feel” of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells, a unique
harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise and sunset, of work and play. The feel of a place is registered in one’s muscles and bones. (183-4)

Tuan asks the question, “how long does it take to know a place?” (183). I’ve now lived on the Eastern Shore for two-and-a-half years; I may be a “come-here”6 as opposed to a “from-here,” but it’s now my home. Yet, have I gotten to know the place?

This touches on Tuan’s next point: “Abstract knowledge about a place can be acquired in short order if one is diligent” (183). I have been quite “diligent:” my work as president of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum has put me firmly in the public eye—I’ve been to countless public meetings, brokered many a local and wider community partnership, fished with local watermen in a wide range of weather, sat in on contentious watermen’s association meetings, made presentations to just about every organization on the Eastern Shore (and many on the western), spoken on the local radio and TV stations, been interviewed and photographed for the local papers, and sailed on our local log canoe races. I work hard at, and take great pride in, listening to locals tell their generational stories (once I could understand their local accents!), visiting their land, and standing on their working watercraft.

Tuan then notes, “The visual quality of an environment is quickly tallied if one has the artist’s eye” (183). It is very hard to live on the Eastern Shore and not develop an artist’s eye, if one does not already have one. Thankfully, I believe I do.

6 An outsider in local Eastern Shore talk; half of the Shore may now be outsiders. For a light-hearted guide for the “come-here,” see Helen Chappell.
“But the ‘feel’ of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years” (183). My direct “place” is the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum: I spend nearly every day of the week working at the museum or playing very near it—I live just up the road from it. And as Tuan next notes, place is “a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise and sunset, of work and play” (183-184). Exactly. Thus, “The feel of a place is registered in [my] muscles and bones” (184).

In respect of this project, Cary de Wit concisely summarizes my preferred definition of sense of place:

. . . the human experience of place in all its dimensions: physical, social, psychological, intellectual, and emotional. It includes the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes held toward a place, as well as residents' conscious and unconscious attachments to place, their feelings about local political and social issues, and their attitudes and feelings toward other places. Sense of place can also be a strong component of personal, as well as group or community identity. In short, to study sense of place is to examine who people in a given place conceive themselves to be as a consequence of that place. (121)

Most importantly here, I believe that de Wit gives credibility to the fact that sense of place is an extremely personal concept. To study an individual’s or community’s sense of place, we must be prepared to examine and understand how people define themselves in relation to their place, and how they consider themselves to be personally affected by that place. This definition
gives even more credibility to the use of photography, and personal narratives of engagement with place, in helping to define place.
Chapter Two:  
Place as reflected through photography and stories

In this chapter I explore how sense of place can be reflected and represented via photography, and through stories—the personal narrative—and then how photography and stories may be effectively combined. This background will be useful as we move into the following two chapters.

First, how does photography capture a sense of place? I would argue that photography is the most powerful tool in our engagement with the world around us. “Through photographs, we see, we imagine: we ‘picture place’,” which in turn continues to influence our notions of space, and place, and landscape (Schwartz and Ryan 1). Indeed, for over 150 years, photography has had the ability to make the world “familiar to us,” to quote the mid-nineteenth century British photographer, William Lake Price (2).

First, I would like to trace how early photography in Britain and the United States was used as a medium for documenting the grandeur of the natural environment—what could be termed as the early forays into capturing the essence of landscape—which in turn helped shape a drive to capturing sense of place via the photograph. Indeed, Jens Jäger, professor of history at the University of Cologne, argues that “the representation of landscape was decisively shaped by the arrival of photography,” and that photographs were “better suited as proof of the distinct character of a landscape,” because they were considered to be exact copies of nature and not an artist’s interpretation (121-122).
Early British landscape photography could typically be viewed as “pastoral.” After the first major photographic exhibition in Britain in December 1852, organized by the Photographic Society of London, photographers in Britain tended to take photographs of more well-known images that were recognizable from history, literature, and current travel writing: “The works of Walter Scott, William Wordsworth and others described landscapes which amateur photographers sought in the countryside” (Jäger 125). Intriguingly, to acknowledge their inspiration for a scene they had photographed, they would often refer to a literary model with a quote from a poem; Jäger notes that the “albums of the Photographic Club abound in references to poetry” (125). Indeed, Victorian writing saw photography as an instrument to capture the spirit of place, “to mediate the human encounter with people and place” (Schwartz and Ryan 3).

By contrast, in the United States the history of landscape photography is closely tied to the history of exploration in the American West. It was the American West’s mountains, the “the first site of US nature tourism”\(^7\) that launched photography and its publication in the United States (Wells 87).\(^8\) Heralding photography “as a tourist interest,” Samuel Bemis (a Boston dentist) made several daguerreotypes during visits to the White Mountains, 1840-41, examples of very early photography (Wells 87). Following along, in 1867, as the “West” became more accessible, Eadweard Muybridge went on his first photographic project in Yosemite, California, commissioned by John Hittel, who then published *Yosemite: its Wonders and its

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\(^7\) Primarily because the mountains were accessible by railroad. See Foster, and Wells, for example.

\(^8\) Interestingly, Sandra Phillips, senior curator of photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, asserts that it is wilderness, rather than history, that is the source of identity for North America (15).
Beauties. Illustrated with Twenty Photographic Views Taken by "Helios" [Eadweard J. Muybridge] and a map of the Valley (1868). It is the first Yosemite book with photographs.

Moses F. Sweetser, who photographed and published Views in the White Mountains, in 1879, comments that:

The majority of travelers prefer to come into the immediate presence of the highest mountains, to face their frowning cliffs, be overshadowed by their immense ridges, and hear the music of their white cascades (np).

As these landscape photographs became more publicly viewed, either through publishing, galleries, or expositions, it became evident that these photographs use a common “language” for a wide variety of landscapes that come to represent the American imaginative inheritance. Accordingly, Jäger feels that the “response towards photographs enforced the place of national history as part of collective memory” (127). The ability for professionals and amateurs alike to photograph a tree or a rock created the means of preserving a national character, and thus photographs created the ability to weave together what Jäger calls “the threads of literary, historical and artistic heritage” (131).

I find this historic contrast between the concept of capturing sense of place with photography in Britain and the United States quite intriguing: while we would all recognize that land is a natural phenomenon, in Britain “all land has been mapped and subjected to human intervention,” while in the United States, the photographer, as Szarkowski noted, was deemed a heroic explorer, challenged by “a wild and incredible landscape” (3). Legends abound that
when photographing in Yosemite, Eadweard Muybridge suspended himself by ropes from cliffs. Not a feat for the faint of heart photographer!

The idea that photographers do not naively capture reality, but are instead influenced by cultural assumptions and personal goals, was in open discussion by the early twentieth century. Quite incisively, the renowned twentieth-century American photographer, Edward Weston, wrote in *Nature, the Great Stimulus* (1932):

Photography as a creative expression—or what you will—must be seeing plus [my italics]. Seeing alone means factual recording. Photography is not at all seeing in the sense that the eyes see. Our vision is binocular, it is a continuous state of flux, while the camera captures but a single isolated condition of the moment. Besides, we use lenses of various focal lengths to purposely exaggerate actual seeing; we ‘overcorrect’ color for the same reason. In printing we carry our willful distortion of fact—‘seeing’—by using papers to intensify the contrast of the original scene or object. This is all legitimate procedure; but it is not seeing literally, it is seeing with intention, with reason (qtd. in Wells 9).

“Seeing plus” as thus described, I believe, should be kept in one’s frame-of-mind when discussing place and photography; photography may have the ability to capture sense of place, but that “sense” can never be deemed to be neutral when considering a technical or aesthetic decision made by the photographer. As Liz Wells questions, “In what ways does the objectness of a photograph, its size, surface qualities and tonal or colour intensity, influence our response?” (11).
Nor can that sense of place be deemed to be neutral when it may be mooted that no judgment or opinion is represented in a photographic work. As photographer and writer Deborah Bright warns, photographs “are charged with meanings that derive from the personal identities and histories of the photographers and which, in turn, are relayed to audiences with their own social and psychic predispositions” (np).

An interesting concept to review in this context is the exponential growth of social media channels in helping to discover and define sense of place, through first-hand accounts—personal narratives—with accompanying photographs taken invariably with smart phones. As I explore further in Chapter Three, Robert de Gast recorded a sense of place and space via his photography and writing—yet we only had a chance to engage and respond to that upon the publication of his books years later. Today, on my own voyage in August 2016, I could instantly publicize and engage others in my experience of place, space and landscape via technology—my smart camera phone—and the social media channels Instagram and Facebook. And in turn I received direct feedback, from all around the world. Via Instagram, “mhergan” advised us to visit a certain pizza place in Cape Charles, and “look for the ship graveyard close to shore” (mhergan np). In this respect, in the age of camera phones, the Free Culture advocate Serge Wroclawski argues that “place is a shared resource” (np). And one way to reflect one’s experience of this “shared resource” is to participate in an archetypal tourist activity: taking

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9 I am reminded of Susan Sontag’s comment, “Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies” (24).
10 McCloskey ships off Kiptopeke Beach, Virginia.
photographs. Susan Sontag goes so far as to quip that “Travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs” (9).

I now wish to move from photography as a tool for recording elements of place, to how sense of place can be represented via stories and narrative, both fictional and non-fiction. Centuries before that first unique image was produced on a silver-coated copper plate in 1839, literature was a key element, and still is today, in helping define place. Indeed, stories are inextricably linked to our feelings toward place; as the writer Rebecca Solnit notes, “place is a story” (3).

Fictional and non-fiction stories and narratives can represent the many, sometimes subtle, ways that people are shaped by the places in which they live; they may include elements such as weather, terrain, and the history of a place and those who shape the culture and the day-to-day lives of individuals who live there, as well as how the physical nature of the land affects cultural values and mindsets. In fiction or non-fiction, “place is central to an understanding of a writer’s work” asserts Morgan State University linguistics professor Milford Jeremiah, since “the notion of place contributes to the larger meaning of what writers intend to convey to readers” (23).

To expand upon how central place can be in understanding a writer’s work, in Chapter Three I look at nine non-fiction, personal narrative travel books, that capture the essence of seeking place through voyaging around the Eastern Shore. It is the concept of the personal

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11 See William J. Mitchell for an excellent historical overview of how societies “have formed their knowledge of past times and distant places” via “visual evidence.”
narrative—or essay—which Horrocks and Lacey believe is a new and growing means of expressing sense of place—that most intrigues me in this project.

In *Extraordinary Everywhere* (2016), contributor Martin Edmond writes a “response essay” to the twelve personal essays included in the book that explore the concept of place.12 Edmond argues that the personal essay is “one of the more flexible forms available to those who write: because it allows the use of the cognizant self as the instrument by which and through which we make our inquiries” (214). “Place” is, therefore, an ideal topic to be explored via a personal essay, because “places are important to us,” and because there is something inherently intrinsic and eternal about place (214). I would agree, therefore, that as sense of place is inherently personal, place can therefore best be captured and expressed via a personal narrative. Edmond believes this must be the case “because the places we have known become reconfigured within as part of us, a part, that is, of our psyche. Those places we have known are ‘in’ us, just as we may feel a part of us is ‘in’ the places we have known” (216). Thus narratives—stories—give us the ability to record our *consciousness* of a place.

What happens though, when we *combine* photography and stories, or photography replaces stories—or text—altogether? William Schaefer (2010) makes a key point, in that even as visual images, photographs operate in close proximity to texts, and can also be conceived of as texts themselves, capable of being “read.” Joel Satore, a contributing photographer with

12 Pat White, who reviewed *Extraordinary Everywhere* for *Landfall* magazine writes that Edmond “coincidentally provides a master class in the craft for any aspiring essayist of place” (np).
"National Geographic Magazine," says, “The ultimate use of photography is to tell a great story, one that moves people;” in fact, he affirms, “Photo stories are the highest calling in still photography” (np).

Too, the selection and making of place raises questions about the processes whereby landscape becomes not only a representation “of” a place, but also a geographical site that is already a representation. This also leads to several fundamental questions Schaefer poses, bearing in mind that in most cases, photography serves a documentary function: what makes a photograph a document? What is the relationship between photographs that are constituted as documents, and documentary photographs? And what kinds of historical documentation can photographs specifically provide? (566). Is a photograph “a document of a moment in history,” or “an evocation of a place at a particular moment in the past?” (559).

Such questions cannot easily be answered. But they raise issues that will be helpful in framing some of the discussion in the next chapter. And in exploring these questions, we can better appreciate the central role that place, and sharing stories and images of places, plays in human identity.
Chapter Three:  
Place as explored through the personal narratives and photographs of voyagers around the Eastern Shore

With the analytical framework in place, I now look closely at nine books that—through their authors’ reflective writing and photography—explore, or attempt to explore through personal narrative, a sense of place in the Eastern Shore.

One of the first accounts of a genuine cruise—that is, for the sole purpose of exploring the Bay and its shorelines and safely navigating oneself while aboard—was written in 1884, by Dr. Joseph T. Rothrock.13 Vacation Cruising in Chesapeake and Delaware Bays is widely viewed as the original “cruiser’s guide.” I believe it is through Rothrock’s words and photographs we first read and discover a sense of place in relation to the Chesapeake Bay and Eastern Shore. On the anniversary of Joseph Rothrock’s summer cruise of the Chesapeake Bay in 1883, Robert Clarke set out to follow the voyage of Rothrock’s Martha, 130 years later. Clarke believes that in Cruising, Rothrock “provides a vivid picture of what the Bay once was, and communicates as plainly as an old family portrait what 130 years ago was the condition of the region” (np). In this respect, and most interestingly, Rothrock “laid open a detailed analysis of a region that had evolved into something very different” (np).

Sadly, only a handful of the photographs Rothrock took on his cruise are included in Cruising. Some years ago, Rothrock’s grandson, Joseph T. Rothrock III, lent his grandfather’s photography album to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum; the museum has copy

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13 Dr. Joseph T. Rothrock is more well known as an American environmentalist, recognized as the “Father of Forestry” in Pennsylvania.
photographs of about thirty images from that album. Only one of the photographs is scanned
into the collection (below). It shows a cypress tree, which the museum believes is along
the James River in Virginia. The image is breathtaking, bearing in mind it is taken
from a “small, cheap camera for dry-
plate photography” (Rothrock 11).

Rothrock began his Chesapeake
Bay voyage counter-clockwise via the
Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, when the
locks were still in place. As he completes
his journey through the Canal, and enters
the Elk River, the fog finally clears. “To
the south there is no visible limit. The
bold, timber-covered bluffs east or west,
with navigable rivers coming in between,
run so that the horizon widens as one
looks south. It is a scene characterized neither by grandeur not yet by quiet beauty alone. The
combination of water, of plains, and of hills in just the proper proportion is what completes this
perfect picture—so perfect, too, that each season brings its own special beauty to the view”
This “perfect picture,”—as seen from the water—in many respects still exists. This is primarily due to the economy of the area and its relative isolation, as well as modern protection of certain wilderness areas and view sheds.\(^\text{14}\)

Some one hundred and thirty-two years later, Rothrock’s snippets align us to a geographical and psychological sensibility that is still strong. For example, one of my favorite of his phrases is: “there is a quiet charm to the many-armed Choptank” (128), a phrase that strongly resonated with me in 2016 during my own circumnavigation. And for anyone who has not explored the Choptank and Little Choptank rivers themselves, just look at a chart to recognize the soft exactness of Rothrock’s words. I doubt that Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph would be aware of Rothrock’s work, but I firmly believe that they would value his authenticity and the particularity of specific places explored on his cruise.

I am also warmed by Rothrock’s comments on the benefits of drawing three feet or less (22), a mantra that is taken up by many to sail in his wake.

The next prominent voyagers to explore the Chesapeake aboard a yacht were the brothers Robert and George Barrie, Jr. They wrote a series of articles that were later published in book form in 1956 as Cruises: Mainly in the Bay of the Chesapeake. The Barries’ series of annual cruises to the Bay began in 1897 and took place on a wide variety of boats, from a flush-deck ketch named Mona and several yawls, to a large schooner, and early raised deck petrol-powered yacht, and a skipjack—seven different boats in all.

\(^{14}\) See John Wennersten (2017) for a view on the effects of sprawl in the Chesapeake watershed.
The distinguished yachtsman and writer Alfred F. Loomis sagely notes in his foreword to a 1952 edition of *Cruises*, a “beauty” of the book derives from the “seemingly changeless character of the Bay itself” (Barrie and Barrie np). In the text, and photographs, we experience some elements of place that are not too hard changed: the oystermen’s sailing working canoes that then carried oysters to market now race summer weekends as sailing log canoes, the grand homes on the Wye River mostly still stand, and, while many of the towns visited have not grown in population, suburbia encroaches upon the marsh grasses and shoreline. *Cruises*, Loomis tells us, “holds as in amber the Bay life of half a century ago” (np).

In contrast to Rothrock, the Barries concentrate on the voyage at hand—in this respect, *Cruises* works exceptionally well as a cruising guide. In fact, in the copy I read from the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum’s library—a gift of a previously well-thumbed copy—each port of call is underlined as a note to the then owner of the book, perhaps planning a similar
voyage. This is not to say that the notion of “sense of place” is incompatible with the ordinary world of practical plans and goals, nor that sense of place is not revealed through *Cruises*:

The scenery is varied, and always picturesque; whether the pleasant sheltered bays of the Eastern Shore, the bold bluffs of the Patuxent, or that of the tropic-like pine-fringed Piankatank. Fish, oysters, and game are all plentiful and cheap. The supply of crabs, indeed, seems to be inexhaustible. Ice is cheap, but not always to be had, and cruisers’ necessities—milk, fresh butter, eggs, and chickens—are found at every farm. Strange to relate, fresh vegetables are the hardest things to get, and when found require more persuasion to induce owners to part with them than any other of the desirable things in which the country abounds. The best of cruisers are doleful when only ‘canned’ things are aboard. (29)

Like other photo essayists of their time, the Barrie brothers use photographs to depict a place in time, with a tight subject matter of towns visited, boats in harbor—working or passing by—and people—not typically people of the Bay, but of the privileged few on expensive pleasure boats. Through their photographs, boats of the era that ply the waters no more, or very seldom—the bugeye, pungee and skipjack—are recognizable.\(^\text{15}\)

In 1938, the writer and artist Joe Richards bought a friendship sloop named *Princess*. The love affair between Richards and his boat is captured exquisitely in his classic seafaring book, *Princess—New York* (1952). The stories of Richards’ cruises center primarily, and

\(^{15}\) Of the two thousand skipjacks that worked the Chesapeake Bay, fewer than thirty remain, with only half of those still active.
uniquely, with Princess as his center of “place,” and secondarily the places the boat takes him, from New York, New Jersey, through the Chesapeake, and down the Intracoastal to Florida. In this respect, Richards’ story is quite unlike any other writers and their voyages discussed in this project. The well-known maritime writer Peter Spectre adroitly describes Princess—New York in these terms, “So well written, so much about the boat that Princess becomes in the reader’s mind virtually the second person in a partnership” (np).

[Photographer unknown], “Joe Richards and his beloved friendship sloop Princess get under way in a calm.” [year unknown]

Richards was not a photographer, but he could draw—his line drawings capture the simple yet personal element of his journey. Too, his evocative passages conjure up elements of
my own voyage on the Eastern Shore, particularly the Smyrna River, and other inlets off the Eastern Shore. Richards’ account of entering the Smyrna River after a particularly nasty storm in the Delaware stands apart in seafaring literature, and gives a seminal description of place that de Gast later explored (and quoted) as did I in my own narrative. Here’s how Richards magically describes his experience:

To be transported so suddenly from the hammering violence of the Delaware to this silence and this beauty made me wonder for a moment if I was alive. To find this deep river, to be folded in the silence of this tall grass, to move without sound or wind or without grounding through the majesty of these towering, golden-green reeds when the mind is tired and the body starved for sleep is an accident. As I held to the mast and saw the peaceful pastures, the motionless low hills, the quiet farmland between the thinning blades of the reeds, I knew I was dead or crazy. (150)

In the early 1970s, Robert de Gast published three books that, through both writing and photographs, epitomize the concept of place in relation to the Eastern Shore: *The Oystermen of the Chesapeake* (1970), *The Lighthouses of the Chesapeake* (1973), and *Western Wind, Eastern Shore: A Sailing Cruise around the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia* (1975). Paula Johnson, curator in the Division of Work and Industry at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, has said that de Gast’s books evoked “a sense of place before the phrase ‘sense of place’ became fashionable” (Brown np).
Dutch by birth, Robert de Gast (1936-2016) spent most of his life as a freelance photojournalist and commercial photographer on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. His haunting back-and-white photographs of watermen, lighthouses and rivers cemented his reputation as one of the premier chroniclers of Tidewater Maryland.

In 1968, de Gast spent an “invisible” year taking six thousand pictures as he followed the Maryland oystermen during an entire season, both on and off the water (Horton 2005 np). The final product was published as *The Oystermen of the Chesapeake* (1970), and is likely de Gast’s most well-known book. In a 2005 review of *Oystermen, Baltimore Sun* columnist and...
environmentalist Tom Horton described it as “a work of genius, one of the finest books on the bay ever done” (2005 np). The book is primarily some one hundred and twenty pages of photographs; each double-page spread offers a quote from the oystermen de Gast followed. Four short essays finish the book, discussing “The Watermen,” “The Boats,” “The Oyster,” and “The Book.” De Gast’s black-and-white photographs thus dominate and are accordingly allowed to speak for themselves; they inherently capture an element of place and space—most importantly, the oystermen’s elemental place within that space—and the oystermen’s relationship with the environment of the Eastern Shore. De Gast wrote in the essay “The Book,” that he had eliminated all the “pretty” pictures, but that “as time went on, it became clear that often the meaningful pictures also showed an extraordinarily romantic environment” (1970 np). Yet the waterman takes the Bay for granted and is not typically aware of the beauty around him:

His appreciation of the water may not be sensitive and may remain unexpressed, yet a waterman, explaining why he had returned to follow the water after a trial period of working ashore, looked over the side of the skipjack we were on and told me, “I just got to see the water runnin’ by the boat.” (np)

The design of Oystermen also helps to signify place. One example is that of a double-page spread with a photograph of an oysterman “nipperin’.”16 Nearly one-third of the page is solid black, and in the top right hand corner, in white letters, a waterman’s quote:

16 “Nippering is where a lone oysterman stands on the bow of his little skiff with miniature tongs, shoving the skiff to and fro with the nippers across shallow, clear, calm coves, spying and plucking single, perfect oysters as he goes” (Horton 2005 np).
Days like this when there

Ain't neither breath,

I go nipperin' for cove arsters.¹⁷

Pick 'em up single for the

roast at the church (np).


The rest of the spread (above) is an expansive monochrome of water, edged at the top by the merest line of low, dark shore. A few stark poles of an old dock are all that break this essential

¹⁷ Oysters.
Chesapeake horizontality. That and the subject of the photo, the nippering oysterman who appears in silhouette, less than a half-inch high, far off in the distance. According to Horton, “He is anything but an afterthought; this daring, outrageous use of space . . . makes him a more powerful presence than any close-up” (2005 np). What is even more striking is that the oysterman, minimized and far in the distance, is brought to the foreground in the text, through his own words. In this respect, de Gast offers a striking interplay of text and image.

With the help of the Coast Guard, de Gast was next to visit thirty-two of the still-standing lighthouses on the Chesapeake Bay. The Lighthouses of the Chesapeake was published in 1973; one hundred and seventy black-and-white images tell their stories—for each lighthouse there is a photograph of the structure itself, a view from the lighthouse, and a close-up of some singular detail of the structure. Now that I have lived on the Eastern Shore for over two years, I have learned to appreciate just what the image of the lighthouse means as a signifier of place on the Eastern Shore. Understanding that the average depth of the Chesapeake Bay is merely twenty-five feet, and the importance of the Bay as a commercial and recreational highway, the lighthouse is as necessary as the air the watermen—in any size watercraft—breathe.

Interestingly, I found a review written in 1974 of Lighthouses in the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. Now that I am familiar with de Gast’s photographic style, and the treatment his book designers\textsuperscript{18} employed to reflect de Gast’s point of perspective regarding sense of place, I was amused to read one reviewer’s comments on the design of the

\textsuperscript{18} Ashton Design, Baltimore, MD.
book: “The book’s layout is attractive, but wasteful. The introductory text occupies about two-thirds of each page, while many of the photographs use up less than a quarter of a page. One wonders if all that white space is necessary, especially in this age of diminishing resources” (Holland 361). The reviewer, albeit then Associate Director Cultural Resources Management at the National Park Service, clearly does not understand the unity of design to help illustrate and confirm sense of place. By contrast, Tom Horton understands the deliberate power of white space; in reviewing *The Oystermen of the Chesapeake*, he adroitly noted, “this daring, outrageous use of space, which few cost-conscious publishers would permit today, makes . . . a more powerful presence than any close-up” (2005 np).

In 1973, de Gast undertook a twenty-four-day, 659-mile circumnavigation of the Delmarva peninsula, in his twenty-two-foot keel-centerboard sloop, *Slick Ca’m*. He recorded the voyage, including photographs, in *Western Wind, Eastern Shore: A Sailing Cruise around the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia* (1975).

To assess Edward Weston’s notion of “seeing plus” in relation to de Gast’s work, let’s review the technical and the aesthetic in relation to his photographs in *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*, and the book itself. De Gast’s primary photographic technique was his use of black and white. In his foreword to *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*, the famed writer John Barth makes note of de Gast’s use of black and white as one of a “series of tactful artistic decisions . . . properly” employed as “infinite shades of gray,” primarily because the Eastern Shore is “strictly

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19 Native son John Barth was born—and still lives—in Cambridge, Dorchester County, Maryland, just twenty-six miles from St. Michaels, where I live. His novels *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) are set in Dorchester County. He has retired from writing.
monotonous . . ., which de Gast responds to with particular sensitivity” (de Gast 1975 xi). His photograph below is a perfect example of this. Barth believes this decision lends itself entirely to the premise behind Western Wind, Eastern Shore, that de Gast “would bring home this time, from this voyage, the place itself” (xi).

What other “artistic decisions” did de Gast make to help Western Wind, Eastern Shore reinforce the concept sense of place? First and foremost, his photographs were taken from his

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20 This image is digitized from the original negative; the published version has a straight horizon, and the grays lightened to emphasize the concept of “monotony.”
boat, as his goal was to photograph his environment as seen from the water. But with his foot on the tiller and his hand on the camera, he was limited in the angles that could be achieved, dictated by the distance he could sail from the shore, and the fact that he was underway most of the time. Thus, his photographs become “quick sketches, instant visual impressions—snapshots, if you will” (xiv). The previous photograph helps reinforce this, the horizon not being horizontal.

Another conscious decision, when it came to publishing *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*, was to intentionally reproduce some of the photographs in a small size “to help convey my feeling about the Eastern Shore’s environment. The Shore is distinguished by a quiet, insinuating beauty, rather than by grandiose and overwhelming scenery” (xiv). Too, his photographs are not aligned to illustrate the text. None of his photographs is titled nor corresponds geographically to any particular point in his writing. Instead they “combine” with the text, “to give the reader my impressions of some of the land- and seascapes I encountered that seemed to me to convey the essence of the Shore” (xiv). Liz Wells confirms this element when referring to landscape photography, as being “generally reflective in mode; landscape photographs rarely ‘shout,’ rather, they are quietly assertive” (10).

An interesting contrast exists between the Barrie brothers’ work and that of Robert de Gast. The Barries were extremely privileged—many of their conversations are based on where their next good meal is coming from, which is not from their own galley. They typically only mix with fellow boaties and those on land from their own social strata. Their photographs and conversations reflect this separation, with those craft similar to the status of their own
represented, as well as people on their own social level. Few are their conversations with “locals”; most are with other privileged boaties. In this respect, they demonstrate a complete indifference to the value of local knowledge. When visiting Worton Creek, Robert Barrie noted: “We then rigged up the sprit-sail on the dinghy and beat up to a lonely-looking pier, where we found an old man who knew absolutely nothing” (31). This is not the case with either Joseph Rothrock or Robert de Gast, who took great pains to interact with the locals they encountered, seeking advice when needed, and invariably receiving aid when misfortune struck; de Gast called them “wonderfully hospitable people, some whose names I’ll never know” (1975, xiv). While the Barries certainly have an eye for landscape, I would venture that their sense of place differs from, say Rothrock or de Gast, bearing in mind the influence of their marked difference in socio-economic status.

Ken Carter, in Chesapeake Reflections: A Journey on a Boat and a Bike (1991), offers a slightly more contemporary story than de Gast—of exploring the Chesapeake Bay—in his case, by pinky schooner and bike (stored on the boat). Focusing on the Bay side of his Eastern Shore journey, he relates stories of passage, port of call exploration, and life living aboard his schooner. The accompanying photographs that Carter incorporates bear little resemblance to the concept of place as captured by de Gast—Carter’s images are centered more on houses lining the shore. In this respect, I find it interesting that even though the two voyagers are photographing “the Eastern Shore,” their concept of what is “place” differs so remarkably: de Gast focuses on landscape, and Carter the built environment.
Sarah Schmidt’s premise behind her book *Landfall Along the Chesapeake: In the Wake of Captain John Smith* (2006) is the most like de Gast’s, and my own. She too incorporates a search for a sense of place: “Storying the land helps us belong in a place, and I set out on my own Chesapeake voyage to tell a story about my homeplace” (7). And she also follows another voyage to compare then and now, as I did by retracing de Gast’s journey: “How better to get to know [Smith] and try to imagine Virginia and Maryland as he first saw them than to retrace his voyages of 1608, to approach the shorelines he saw from the water?” (5).

Indeed, my own journal can be seen as representing a new trend in which contemporary writers trace the routes of earlier voyages. On the anniversary of Joseph Rothrock’s summer cruise of the Chesapeake Bay in 1883, Robert Clarke set out to follow the voyage of Rothrock’s *Martha*, one hundred and thirty years later. He published the story of his voyage in *In Martha’s Wake: Vacation Cruising the Chesapeake* (2013). Clarke offers an interesting premise toward the end of his voyage: “Rothrock’s story of a vacation cruise on the Bay 130 years earlier had given way to our story of the Chesapeake. And on this day, that story was giving way to a new story with a new life.21 Our story is a part of a collective story, with no telling where it may lead” (np). Quoting extensively from Rothrock—perhaps a little too extensively—Clarke takes the time to chart the differences—if any—between Rothrock’s experiences of place and his own. Clarke finds that much has changed from an environmental perspective, citing the devastating loss of sea grasses, oysters, crabs, with the “bald eagle, bottlenose porpoises, rock fish, and frogs... all in retreat” (np). Clarke relies heavily on his camera (not very place-evocative

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21 The birth of a granddaughter toward the end of their voyage.
images, at all) to capture his experiences, which adds to his story, but overall, he is no match for Rothrock’s subtle awareness, through his pen and photographs, for what signifies “place” on the Eastern Shore.

An interesting contrast between the earlier accounts of the late 1800s and early 1990s with those in the last twenty years—with Robert de Gast falling somewhat in the middle—is the change in the use of the waters off the Eastern Shore. Fifty to one hundred years ago, activity on the Bay was largely commercial. Rothrock, the Barries, and Richards make several references to the many skipjacks and bugeyes working the Bay, and to the Bay’s working waterfronts. Much has changed in this respect. More recent voyaging stories, such as those of Carter, Clarke, and Schmidt reflect that the Bay is now a place used predominantly for recreation, with the working waterfront challenged by “more and more recreational boats in more and larger marinas [competing] for space in the same waters” (Lesher np). Much that was distinctive about the Eastern Shore, especially in relation to its maritime history—and still recognizable even in the 1970s when Robert de Gast was voyaging—has disappeared as metropolitan development and economic change has accelerated and transformed its land- and seascapes. John Wennersten, professor of American History at the University of Maryland, quips that “Whatever is good and true about the Eastern Shore will at some future date . . . end up as a heritage piece at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum at St. Michaels” (1992, 269).

It is interesting to compare the style of photographs within the various voyaging books described above, when representing “place,” and recognize the use of black and white photography in the books. Of these books, all authors up to and including de Gast use black and
white photography. Earlier than de Gast, color photography was not yet possible, yet de Gast made a conscious choice to use black and white. I would strongly agree with Tom Horton that de Gast’s “black-and-white photographs captured the elemental nature of watermen and their work better than color ever could” (2005 np). And why indeed would this be the case, over color? I believe that black and white inherently lends itself to the oft-times monotonous landscape of the Eastern Shore; the oysterman’s life is one of unremitting hard, hard work, most often in sub-freezing temperatures; and the lighthouses of the Chesapeake Bay stand alone and somber as they peer from fog and gray.

De Gast reflects utterly the “sense” of place of the Eastern Shore — there are only three deliberately small photographs in Western Wind, Eastern Shore of his sloop Slick Ca’m, and only one of those includes a photo of himself—a very small one in which you cannot even recognize de Gast, as he has a camera up to his face, taking a photograph of his photographer. All his photographs bar this one, are people-less. The remainder are purely landscape—and often either full page or double page spread—capturing a space that exudes character and thus becomes place.

Another mark of de Gast’s style in this book is that he works to subvert the expectations of touristic photography. Photography has an ambivalent relationship with tourism, and, according to the British sociologist John Urry, is “intimately bound up with the tourist gaze”

22 Contemporary Eastern Shore landscape photographer Cal Jackson makes an interesting personal observation: “For me, the difference between black and white and color, is that you can be trapped in your observation, in your thought process, by color, and never see the photo, never really see the photo. But in black and white, you see the photo.” Recorded in The Talbot Spy.
The fact that de Gast doesn’t include captions with any of his photos—and all the other writers do—indicates his focus on eliciting a sense of place via landscape, rather than “documenting” as one may in a travel guide. Even though his photographs accompany his daily adventures, the reader can never be sure that those photographs correspond to the locations described in his text.23

Is there a difference between the images that De Gast took and wrote around in 1973 and published in 1975, and those that I took in 2016? By following his circumnavigation, am I the tourist and not de Gast? In that respect, am I thus changing the significance of the place—the Eastern Shore? Brian Human of the Environment and Planning Department at Cambridge City Council, in the UK, asserts that work like de Gast’s is based precisely on looking at the individual and incidental qualities of a place and not on the celebration of the obvious; in this respect de Gast does not create icons of place, such as Human argues are created by the tourism industry (e.g., Paris is the Eiffel Tower, Sydney the Sydney Opera House, etc.) (82).

When we look at de Gast’s photographs, most them are nearly impossible to place; possibly the only “Kodachrome icon” that is highly recognizable in Western Wind, Eastern Shore is a striking image of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

I contend that when I undertook my own voyage around the Eastern Shore in August 2016, following in Robert de Gast’s footsteps in Western Wind, Eastern Shore, I did not consider myself to be a tourist, and I found much to reflect upon the sense of place not only as

23 In the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum’s copy of Western Wind, Eastern Shore, there are pencil notations of where the photos had been taken. One of the museum’s long-time volunteers, who had known de Gast personally, had sat down with him and asked him where he took each of them.
experienced by de Gast, but also by Joseph Rothrock, Robert and George Barrie, and Joe Richards.
Conclusion:


I began this project with a passion to explore this place I now call home—the Eastern Shore—and then to find a way to best define and express that sense of place. Through discovering Robert de Gast’s work, *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*, I discovered the means to achieve both goals: to follow in his wake, by circumnavigating the Eastern Shore by boat; and to capture that experience via writing a personal essay, and taking photographs of the places we visited—just as de Gast did.

I did not want to replicate his voyage around the Eastern Shore—circumstances such as time, and type of boat, and crew made sure of that: de Gast had twenty-four days—I only had eight; de Gast could sail and sleep on his boat—we had a fast 225hp outboard and three or four people to fit in a very small cabin; and my (older) crew emphatically did not want to sleep on the boat! While de Gast had time to fully explore the nooks and crannies of the route he took, we mostly just had time to poke our noses in, breathe in the flavor he had experienced, and then turn around to continue our journey.

But I firmly believe my approach did not detract from the overall purpose of journey—of discovery—which, like de Gast, helped create a personal “place” for him, and for me. Thus, I also believe my journey became more of a personal pilgrimage, rather than of merely playing
the role of the tourist who tried to replicate a journey taken forty-three years previously.

In literature—fiction or non-fiction—place is central to an understanding of a writer's work. As I argue that sense of place is inherently personal, I believe that place can, therefore, best be captured and expressed via the personal narrative—of telling stories—as a more effective and personal means of expressing one's relationship with place. Through the personal narratives of others, and especially through the writing of my own personal essay, I discovered a much stronger and more intimate way not only of exploring sense of place, but of creating my own personal definition of place in relation to the Eastern Shore, and then sharing that intimacy and sense of belonging with others.

A secondary aspect of this project was an examination of academic literature focused on defining place. Given the fact that place is everywhere, all the time, I found it problematic that there are so many varied definitions when discussing place. Though well researched and written about in academic works from multiple disciplines, place is not a definitive word within academic terminology. Yet even though the study of place has been the subject of multiple disciplines, I recognize that there is a critical consensus that describes places as spatial locations that have been given meaning by human experience: space becomes a place when it becomes familiar, when it is named.

This section of the project then developed as a study of place as reflected through photography and literature. Photography has a long history of association with place—the ability of the camera as a means of recording place is now ubiquitous. And in this age of technology, when we’re able to instantly publicize and engage others in our experience of
In conclusion, my own sense of place here on the Eastern Shore is characterized, on the one hand by being a “come-here”—and not only as a come-here from three very different states in the USA (New York, California, North Carolina), but from another country entirely, New Zealand, with an entirely different accent24—yet where “from-heres” have tolerantly, and very kindly, invited me to throw myself into typically Eastern Shore activities (fishing for Rockfish, log canoe racing and capsizing, crab feasts with Old Bay Seasoning and cold beer, cub scout outings around a fire on the banks of the Wye River, hilarious game show evenings at the local library, . . .), which has helped instill a powerful sense within me of “being,” “belonging,” and of “living” here—of domicile, of being accepted and understood as myself, 25 in this particular place. Undertaking my own voyage of circumnavigation around the Eastern Shore, with two people who mean a great deal to me (also come-heres), lit a fire of passion, and understanding, and appreciation within me, for the stunning beauty, color, mood, light, isolation, danger, loss, fear—of economic and climate change, and government intrusion—and, ultimately, the shared stories of this place.

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24 In my first week as President of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, in mid-July 2014, I met with three representatives of the Talbot Watermen’s Association. After ten minutes of discussion I had to admit that I couldn’t understand a word they were saying. Their immediate response was, “We can’t understand a word you’re saying!” A few months later, at an event at the museum, the same chap called me over to meet his wife: “This is the woman I couldn’t understand!”

25 In this project, I have not touched at all upon the fact that I am a gay woman living in a very conservative part of the US; to date, it hasn’t been an issue. The biggest reaction has been to the fact that of five presidents, I am the first woman to lead CBMM since it was founded in 1965.
On the other hand, this place has, over the last two-and-a-half-years, integrated itself so deeply into my personal sense of identity, and my story, in ways that now consume a large part of my heart, that makes me so very proud to call the Eastern Shore not only my home, but my place.
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