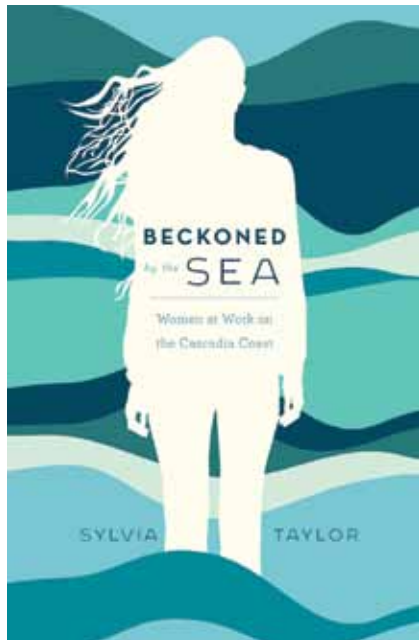




HOLIDAY READS



BECKONED BY THE SEA *Women at Work on the Cascadia Coast*

By Sylvia Taylor, Heritage House, 2017
\$19.95 paperback, \$9.99 Kindle

THE VOICES OF two dozen women whose lives are influenced by or devoted to the sea resound in Vancouver-based Sylvia Taylor's engaging book, *Beckoned by the Sea—Women at Work on the Cascadia Coast*.

Although not officially on any map, the Cascadia Coast, according to Taylor, runs from southeast Alaska, along British Columbia, Washington, Oregon to northern California. It covers the territories where Indigenous people lived, fished, hunted, warred, feasted and travelled. It's the region where intrepid Europeans tried to tame the dense forests and braved the mighty currents pushed by relentless tides among the tens of thousands of

islands lining the coast.

Most of the time, men were the most likely to brave the sea's formidable challenges. Women did the yeoman's job of maintaining a wilderness home, raising a family, finding and preparing food and generally keeping life together. Many also worked in the back-breaking cannery industry. Much of women's work included perseverance and physical strength, although female muscles weren't usually remarked upon.

But times have evolved. In the last few decades, women have taken their place as captains, fishers, engineers, shipwrights, kelp harvesters, shellfish cultivators and marine artists. Taylor gives each a chance to tell her story.

Breaking barriers wasn't always easy. Take Diana Talley of Port Townsend, now a shipwright and owner of Taku Marine. In her early days, no one would hire a woman, especially one with a love of boats but no experience. Eventually, she taught herself boat building; today, she works to preserve the marine culture and economy in her hometown, which includes environmental stewardship.

We meet Tsimka Martin, who runs T'ashii Paddle School in Tofino. She builds on her father Joe Martin's art—he carves traditional canoes—taking paddlers to Meares Island to experience the traditions of the Nuu-chah-nulth people. Lori Papajohn has made a career out of being a professional mermaid, performing in tanks, pools and aquariums and fulfilling fantasies of young and old. Captain Laura Rasmussen runs a prawn-fishing boat on B.C.'s central coast. Comox's Rhona Lettau earned all her certifications to become a Canadian Coast Guard captain. We also learn about several "history keepers," who preserve Nuu-chah-nulth lore, and Japanese and Alaskan fishing histories.

One of the contradictory aspects of this book is that although it celebrates women who've broken into formerly barred marine-related employment, they're still exceptional—not the rule. The proof? We don't see books with stories about guys who've "broken tradition" to become tugboat captains, prawn fishers or deckhands in the Coast Guard.

One quibble. Taylor has worked on fishboats so I was surprised she wrote this sentence about one of her skippers: "she was caught in a typhoon . . . with winds of thirty-three knots gusting to forty knots . . ."

That's a gale, Ms. Taylor, not a typhoon.

—Marianne Scott

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