

# WoodenBoat REVIEW

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## *Beckoned by the Sea: Women at Work on the Cascadia Coast*

Reviewed by Anne Bryant

In the early 1980s, Sylvia Taylor was a deckhand on a salmon troller. I didn't know that when I first picked up her most recent book, *Beckoned by the Sea*, but as I sit down to meditate about what made this book special, I think I realize why I liked it so very much. She was very present, but not dominating, in her storytelling. She spoke with the authority that comes from experience, but deftly stepped back with grace to let her subjects shine.

The Cascadia coast is defined in *Beckoned by the Sea* as stretching from "southern Alaska to British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and northern California." This is more than a dramatic backdrop, dappled with islands and rife with bears and challenging weather—the geography and the trajectories of the people in this book are inextricably bound.

This tough and beautiful place drives what is, essentially, an anthology; the book is a neatly presented collection of compartmentalized biographies and profiles of women who make their livelihoods there. In small bites and quick reads, we are introduced to a spectrum of women whose jobs range from writing and performance to boatbuilding and fishing, and we're carried gracefully from one to the next with the gentle touch of our narrator.

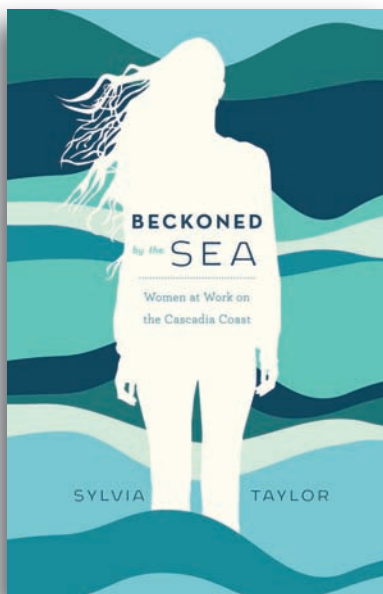
"Come, the twenty-four stories inside its covers beckon," Renée Sarojini Saklikar says in the book's foreword, "come and learn, be fascinated and entranced: by

detail, by myths and legends, personal anecdotes, geographic and historical lore." This whimsical and tightly wrapped description of the book is most accurate.

The women documented are categorized as The Harvesters, The Travelers, The Creators, The History Keepers, The Teachers, and The Protectors. Diana Talley, a shipwright and owner of Taku Marine in Port Townsend, Washington, is a creator, of course (see WB No. 245). Huge swaths of this book are long quotations from the subjects themselves, and we get to travel along with Talley as she describes, non-linearly and in her own words, how she came to boatbuilding and what makes the Boat Haven at Port Townsend so special. One of her quotes is nearly three satisfying pages of her voice, telling her tale while moving back and forth through time.

"For years I never called myself a shipwright because I didn't bother to look it up in the dictionary. I called myself a boatbuilder because I built boats," Talley says. "About two years ago I looked up 'shipwright' and they had a real watered-down definition and they called it anyone who works on boats. In my mind a shipwright is someone who has skills to build a wooden boat."

When Taylor does step into the narrative, it's to acclimate the novice or the uninitiated to terminology or culture, or to set a tone. She might fill in a piece of missing information, but she rarely passes judgment. Again, she lets each woman shine on her own. At the beginning of each of those main categories, she describes the bigger part that each category plays in the scheme of things. She says of the History Keepers, "They prepare the tapestry for those who seek knowledge and the lessons about the ways things are done, how things came to be. They have answered the bone-deep call to find the lost threads and weave them back in to hold knowledge for the teachers to help shape the



future. They hear the music of history in their heads, its notes written in their hearts.”

Taylor’s cadence is solemn and stops just shy of worship. Her words are soft and carefully chosen. The tone is set as you embark on a new meditation in each category, or, in each facet of Cascadia. It’s intentional and, for the reader, soothing in a way, to be sung to like this. She loves this subject, she delighted in it as she wrote, and the reader reaps the benefits.

That means, also, that we come right to the edge of some woo woo. Later in The Creator segment, we meet Lori Pappajohn, a “professional mermaid.” In contrast to the environmental warriors, fishermen, and skilled laborers, the concept seemed almost frivolous. Even so, it ended up being one of my favorite passages in the book. The truth is, all this adulation would be a little too cloying if it weren’t for this mermaid’s straightforward way of describing what it’s like to be a musician, a model, and an environmental ambassador. That’s what mermaiding is.

Pappajohn found her way to this by accident, and so doesn’t take herself too seriously. She’s just found herself a very fun niche in the world, one that Taylor treats with the same deference as these other, more traditional occupations. Still, Pappajohn yuks it up a bit. “People would see me monofinny and say, ‘Oh, you’re a mermaid.’ And I said, ‘That’s goofy.’ I was blown away by how many people were swimming like mermaids around the world,” Pappajohn says. “Before I was a water mermaid I was a harp mermaid so I would get hired for big conferences at five-star hotels. I would be playing my harp by

the seafood platters as a mermaid. Many times they had a giant clamshell that they put me in. How uncomfortable it was to sit in this clamshell and hold my harp so I [wouldn’t] fall out.”

This is not a book for women, it’s a book about women. I hope it’s suggested to the women and girls in your life, but also shared with men who have a love of maritime occupations, or of the Pacific Northwest, or of boating and fishing. Anyone would enjoy this celebratory work, and I came away especially wanting to hand the book over to a man next.

I’m in awe of the diverse occupations of the inspiring people Taylor found in such a narrow subject: people who work on the water, who are women, in a very particular region. Sometimes I feel conflicted about books that segregate women’s stories apart from the whole, which in this case, is the maritime heritage and maritime future of the Cascadia coast. I think most people, including me, want to be in a philosophical place where gender itself is not remarkable...but isn’t it? I’ve been, and not just felt, invisible at times in certain settings as I’ve lived aboard, and at other times, it was thought remarkable (literally) that I row as my partner, a man, sits as a passenger. Maybe a celebration is in order. Taylor is boosting the signal and shining a light on the passionate (and lucrative!) pursuits of these skilled women. If I had read a book like this in high school, I would have gravitated to boats a lot sooner. Representation, as they say, is *everything*.

Anne Bryant is WoodenBoat’s associate editor.

## Two Bags from Veto Pro Pac

Reviewed by Greg Rössel

I remember buying my first Craftsman carpenter’s toolbox at the Sears, Roebuck and Co. store in Waterville, Maine. I was a carpenter’s apprentice in Union, Maine, at the time. The toolbox came complete with a removable steel tote tray and a knock-out slot for a framing square.

It was tough as a boiled owl, though heavy as a Mosler safe and as handy and subtle as a railroad boxcar to move around. But it survived being thrown into and falling out of the back of a pickup truck. It was even, after being trussed up in duct tape, tumbled into the cargo hold of an airplane for a cross-country flight. It never was “convenient” or “user-friendly.”

What I really needed was a box with a tool arrangement similar to Harry Bryan’s famous cedar rack (see WB No. 103), where all the lumber is stored vertically and can be gone through like books in a library. My



GREG RÖSSEL

**“After working as a carpenter for over 25 years, I became fed-up with the various tool-carrying devices available on the market,” Roger Brouard writes on Veto Pro Pac’s website. His experimentation resulted in a line of burly, stitched bags that come in sizes and configurations to suit a variety of tasks.**

toolboxes, even today, are like my lumber pile. All the best stuff is always on the bottom.

Enter, the Veto Pro Pac line of toolboxes and bags where ruggedness and vertical storage are where it’s at.