



INTRODUCTORY BIOS OF TARSUS MEMBERS

The Arthur Ransome Society in the United States

Theodor Schuchat, Bellevue WA (Autumn, 1990)

I am an author, now writing books after a career as a journalist, editor and political ghostwriter. I first read *Swallows and Amazons* and its sequels during the 1930s, as they were being published in this country. I did not read the last two or three, which were published here in the 1990s, because I was by that time in college and the Army. My interest in Arthur Ransome was reawakened a few years ago when my wife and I retired here, on the shores of Lake Washington. She gave me a wooden sailing dinghy for Christmas, and I was taught the rudiments of sailing. When I discovered that my sister-in-law had read *Swallows and Amazons* and a few others, I started collecting Arthur Ransome's books and those about him. Curiously, although my wife sailed much more than her sisters, she had not previously read any of his books.

Rereading them was an enlightening experience. I noted how far ahead of their time they were in that the girls were fully as vigorous and resourceful as the boys. This I recalled from my first reading in my youth: the Peter Wimsey novels by Dorothy Sayers, which I read at about the same time, had the same attribute, I well remember, which is no doubt one of the reasons they, too, have enjoyed renewed popularity. Also, now having done a bit of sailing, I noted how specific and detailed Ransome's books are about small boat handling. As I told my wife, one could almost learn to sail solely by reading him.

Two years ago, when we spent the best part of a year in England, we visited the Ransome room at the Kendal museum, toured the environs of Coniston Water (seeing Wildcat Island for ourselves), meandered through the Norfolk Broads on a Longboat (clearing the bridge at Potter Heigham) and had the eerie experience of encountering the *Death and Glory* laid up in a boatyard. The mistress of the yard assured us that it was indeed the *Death and Glory* albeit the replica made for the BBC-TV version of *Swallows and Amazons*.

If anyone who reads this has friends in public broadcasting, I hope they will join my efforts to get that BBC program, entitled *Swallows and Amazons Forever*, broadcast over PBS. According to his biographer, and indeed Ransome himself, his books sold in this country in greater numbers than in his own country. *Swallows and Amazons* and several of the succeeding titles are in print and available in the U.S. today. Young people are still discovering and cherishing them. Why then, should there be so few of us on the American list of TARS?

Jack Gates, Freeport ME (Autumn, 1990)

(The first portion is quotes taken from an article by Nancy Heiser in a June, 1990, issue of the Portland ME "Times Record").

"Jack Gates of Freeport will freely admit that he is a member of a cult of sorts. Although he is 61 years old, Gates is a fan of the deceased English author of children's books, Arthur Ransome. Gates is so avid that he has booked a two-week trip this summer to England's Lake District for the inaugural meeting of the Arthur Ransome Society, a gathering of fans young and old from all over the world...

"It was in an English bookstore on the island of Madeira, off Portugal, five years ago that Gates became reacquainted with the work of Arthur Ransome. He had read several Ransome books in grammar school and junior high.

"Although my childhood was nothing like it, I dreamed the *Swallows and Amazons* life,' Gates recalled. Seeing the books on his travels rekindled a dream.

"I knew then exactly what I wanted to do with the rest of my life,' said Gates. "When he returned home, he commissioned two boat builders, Bob Miller and Rob Stevens of Woolwich, to build him a tiny wooden sailboat, not unlike that used by the children in Ransome's books.

"The boat has given me the happiest four years of my life,' said Gates, who sails all 12 months of the year to islands and points in Casco Bay.

"I always felt that I owed Ransome something for the fact that I rediscovered his books and got the push to get my own boat built,' he said.

"So when he learned of the nascent Arthur Ransome Society, Gates decided to get involved. He has corresponded with all of the steering committee members. He designed a tee shirt with 'Swallows and Amazons Forever' upon it. He donated a set of Ransome books to the Curtis Memorial Library. He figures he has read each of the 12 books in Ransome's series about half a dozen times...

"Gates has a hard time putting his finger on why Arthur Ransome is so appealing an author. 'Nostalgia is part of it. These are kids

living an ideal childhood. Plus they are whopping good stories,' he said...

"Gates himself...has engineered his work life to give him the most time to follow his avocations--sailing, hiking, skating, music..., and the natural world. He graduated from Harvard in 1951, pursued an advanced degree in marine biology at Cornell, got involved in theater work in New York City and Boston, worked on and off in libraries, and finally, 19 years ago, ended up as nighttime circulation assistant at Bowdoin College's library... He works from 5 to midnight, leaving his days free for other pursuits. Gates is also a freelance indexer."

(End of newspaper quotes). Now follows Mr. Gates' account of his time in England. :

I spent one week in Lake District and one week in the Norfolk Broads & East Anglia. In the Lake District, after the "launch" of T.A.R.S. I visited Ransome's grave (also Beatrix Potter's Hill Top farm), then went over to Coniston Water, where I saw Wildcat Island & secret harbor, hiked around the fells & found Swallowdale (I think) & climbed Kanchenjunga (in a torrential rain!) Also saw Holly Howe & Swainson's Farm from a distance.

In the Broads, I took public steamers from Wroxham, Horning, & Potter Heigham, and was the guest of a very nice couple for a day on their "Teasel" look-alike, who pointed out everything to me--where no. 6 coot with the white feather nested, etc., etc.

Then up to Walton-on-Naze where I walked the Wade (at 8-9 p.m. with the tide coming in!) Then to Pin Mill--lovely town. Invited into Alma Cottage by Ransome fans living there, and taken out to inspect the Nancy Blackett (the model for the Goblin) by its present owner.

Full trip, exhausting, but very rewarding.

I wish these annual get-togethers could be longer--exploring the Lake District a week, and then the Broads-Pin Mill-Secret Water area for a week --whole families, with the adults doing things together, & their children having adventures together on their own.

I also wish that once a year--perhaps during Xmas or Easter vacation, there could be a real boat trip on the ocean--perhaps to Madeira over there, or Caribbean over here.

Also I think the-AR publishers might market a AR calendar--one of his drawings from each of the books for each month; also a board game, using all the characters, boats, animals, etc., & let children invent their own adventures.

Looking forward to hearing about the other American A.R.fans... Swallows and Amazons for ever!

Ellen Tillinghast. Burlington VT (Autumn, 1990)

Almost 60 years ago (I'm now 70), in January, 1931, my father brought a book home for me, in bed with a bad cold. I thanked him, of course, but, hard to believe, my first reaction was negative. I thought by the title that the book was about birds in South America. I opened it, liked the end paper map and the familiar poetry and song quotations from the first and second chapter headings, and now much more drawn to it, began to read it. "Read"? No, devoured it. After its last word, I turned back to the beginning and read it all over again.

Often I've since wondered about its appeal and strong hold. With Depression anxiety in the air and with my growing difficulties over some schoolwork, life with the Swallows and Amazons was a matter of utter sunshine and achievement. I was incorporated into their island life. They were my closest friends. My behavior depended on their opinion, and I refrained (or tried to) from doing what they wouldn't like. Whenever I couldn't sleep, I thought of Titty unable to stay awake in the captured "Amazon", and I slept - also.

At first I didn't even realize that the author and characters were English, the locale England. What put me straight on that is long forgotten, but once I knew it, my whole life became determined by an inner conviction that rapidly developed, namely, "If England and English people are like this, I want to go there."

I would need to wait six years. During that time I wrote my first letter to Mr. Ransome and have his reply on a plain postcard, "Sorry, I can't write more than one book a year." I kept a scrap book of Ransome material, plenty of it as a new book appeared each year. It contains book covers of the American and English editions, reviews from the "New York Times" and the "New York Herald Tribune", also articles from the Junior Literary Guild's magazine, "Young Wings", when his book had been selected for a particular month. More and more over the years has been and continues to be added to the collection.

In 1937 I went to England with an organization that places each American in your group with a family for a month and that also provides time for the group both to cycle through an area and to spend time in one place. The second lifelong thread in my life, Ransome being the first, started when I met the Stanier family. We've remained friends ever since. One of them in particular and I have made countless Ransome- related excursions in the Lakes and East Anglia. And the third thread, also started that summer, was the Lake District. The organization might have chosen any beautiful area for our group, but they happened to select the one I wanted to visit above all else, the Lake District. I've lost count of the number of times I've returned. It never fails to produce what I call U.K. euphoria.

Now, a brief finish to who I am. I've been a college faculty wife, am a mother of three daughters, and a grandmother to four boys and a girl. The daughters share my love of the books, but they've not caught fire for the grandchildren. I've never worked for money, but as a volunteer I've been active in the Episcopal Church with diocesan and parish committees and, now, work daily at the local public library. I am blissfully content handling the books and paying close attention to nitpicky details that mean books are in the right place for when the patrons want them. Any book may do for somebody what Ransome has done for me.

I. W. Stephenson. Menominee MI (Autumn, 1990)

Why did I join TARS? Since the days of WW II I have enjoyed the various Swallows & Amazons books as well as other AR

writings that I have been able to find. Particularly enjoyed was Racundra's First Cruise.

Now a retired air carrier pilot, I live with my wife in a home on the shores of Green Bay. I often think of it as Beckfoot. In 1969 I acquired a replica of "Amazon" from Landamore's of Wroxham. She summers in our local marina and lives in our barn in the winter. Built of varnished mahogany, she is a real beauty. Any TARS members are certainly welcome to have a sail in her!

I. W. Stephenson IV, Menominee MI (Spring, 1991)

I am writing to inform on someone, namely me, a new member of TARS. I am the son (& only child) of fellow TARS member Capt. I.W. Stephenson.

So, who am I? I am 19 yrs. old, a student at UW Green Bay. I carry a double major of History & Social Change & Development. Through the halfway point of my sophomore year I'm doing quite well. I am also on the sailing team at school. As far as my hobbies are concerned, they include sailing, avid reading (of course including Ransome) & other various sports.

During my summers I do my best to live up to the standards set by Mr. Ransome. I've owned a series of small sailboats, raced them, and have also raced on my Dad's boat & others. I've sailed all over our home waters of the Bay of Green Bay & on Lake Michigan, including several Chicago to MacKinac races. Currently I own a boat that is 14 feet long, (a Johnstone one design 14) that I now think that I will name Swallow. Perhaps, not an exact replica like my father's, but none the less a boat deserving of the name, I do believe. One final personal note. My girl friend has recently become quite interested in Ransome's books. We recently gave her a full set of S & A's books, yet another satisfied (word not included).

I hope in the future to be able to attempt to contribute to TARS Journal. I have several ideas which I hope to work on, probably not until the summer months. I will soon have an Apple MacIntosh Classic up & running. There is a possibility that this could be put to the service of TARS.

Why did I join TARS? Literally I joined because my father (fellow TARS member) was kind enough to pay this typically broke college student's way.

Besides that, Ransome has been a part of my life ever since I can remember. My Dad read them to me & then gave me my own set, which now fill a shelf at school.

I have spent numerous summers on my home waters trying to re-create various Ransome stories in a variety of sailboats. In fact, my current boat will likely be named Swallow. Although my boat is for the younger generation & more unstable than my father's boat, any TARS member is welcome on board. So, I will sign off this dispatch.

Frank Kurt Cylke, Great Falls VA (Spring, 1991) (as reported by Mr. David Carter, TARS Chairman)

"By occupation he is the Director of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, in the Library of Congress. He has undertaken to produce Braille and audiocassette versions of 'Mixed Moss' for us, (as well as publicising the Society's existence in specialised and other libraries and library publications), in the hope that we may draw more members that way and introduce more disadvantaged children to the Ransome books."

Dorothy M. Hill. (Mrs. William H.) Jacksonville FL (June, 1991)

A very dear friend of mine in England sent me a piece from a magazine telling about the founding of TARS and I couldn't wait to join.

I was born in Headingley, Leeds, Yorkshire in December 1926 and attended Leeds Girls High School there and also (after being called up and working in a Government office at the end of W.W.II) college. Then I taught students at the North of England Secretarial College to take letters in French and German in Pitmans Shorthand... sounds very old-fashioned now. In 1948 I married a foreigner--a young man from Derbyshire--and we lived both in Derbyshire and then back in Yorkshire and gradually acquired three young sons. My husband attended the Harvard Business School in 1954/6 on a Fellowship and Fulbright Grant and we spent the second year together in Boston and returned to England for two years and in 1958 returned to live and work in the U.S.A. and are still here.

My very first Arthur Ransome book was a gift from an aunt--she continued the practice for quite a few years and I still have all those old copies. I knew a girl who was at LGHS at the same time as I was, called Cecily Lupton, and rumour had it that she was Arthur Ransome's niece, but she was very quiet about it! Fifty years later we met again in Windermere at the TARS fifth anniversary party. There wasn't much time to talk that evening but we enjoyed the little visit we did manage.

When I try to pin down why I love his children's books so it isn't easy. My family (I have one younger sister) was to say the least very un-adventurous--so I suppose that's why the families I met in AR's books became so dear to me. All I know about sailing, sea-going, etc. I have learned from AR.

When my sons were all in school--in Baltimore, MD--I started-working as a volunteer in the elementary school library and this led to a whole new career. I returned to the university to take library science courses and have been involved in school libraries ever since... really a natural for an old bookworm like me. Whilst in Baltimore we added a little girl to our family and moving later to Jacksonville we enrolled her in a small private girls' school and before you knew it I was working in the library and have now been with the school for fourteen years, during many of which I've been teaching Latin and typing and running the library. Our school has just been merged with another bigger private school and at present I'm in limbo not knowing whether they'll want me back here in September. I probably wouldn't be too unhappy to retire--could go and volunteer in the public library, or I have a friend who manages

a book store. Plenty of other options and my husband is going to retire soon anyway.

Back to AR--through the years I have collected quite a lot of material about and by him and I think you could say it is one of my hobbies. Of course whatever library I've worked in has always had AR books and I've read and "book talked" them to many middle schoolers through the years. I regard him as a wonderful early example of Young Adult literature--would there were more like him. Tomorrow my husband and I are leaving for three weeks in England --the first week on the edge of Lake Windermere! I'm excited about visiting Abbot Hall and doing some AR exploring. Previously we've only been in the area on very brief stop-overs so this will be a treat. I'll be busy with my camera. Wish I weren't going to have left the area by the AG Meeting date.

Wayne Hammond, Williamstown MA (June, 1991)

I discovered Arthur Ransome only in 1987, when I was 34. I have an interest in children's literature, and bought Swallows and Amazons on a whim. I had not read so splendid a story in a long time! I immediately bought the remaining books in the series as well, and since then, my Ransome shelf has grown to include some of his non-Swallows books, and books about him. I was instantly attracted to the Walkers and Blacketts (and later the Callums), and attracted to the camaraderie and adventures, such as I never had as a painfully shy boy but am pleased to enjoy now--as much as a working life allows, and though I'm not much of a sailor or camper.

In 1988 I went on a two-day coach (bus) tour of the Lake District, not (as the guide assumed of everyone) to worship Wordsworth or Ruskin or even Beatrix Potter. Ransome was never mentioned by anyone, and I saw few of his books for sale. Unfortunately, the coach stopped for only a few minutes at one end of Coniston Water, which was shrouded in fog. Of course, I went to the water's edge and dipped in my hand. I was also sorry that we did not stop at the Abbot Hall Museum in Kendal. But the tour did include a steamer excursion on Lake Windermere ending in Bowness, and I had Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint's Trunk at hand to refer to Christina Hardyment's maps. It was an overcast, very chilly day on the lake--early October, the end of the tourist season--but I left the comfort of the steamer's cabin for the deck, both to see better and to feel the elements as we passed Blakeholme and Silverholme islands and proceeded into (as I automatically called it) Rio Bay. I was too happy to feel the cold. The tour lodged overnight in Grasmere, where I took a photo of a firefighters' meeting point and thought of Pigeon Post.

For the past fifteen years I've been a rare books librarian at Williams College in western Massachusetts. But now I have a fiancée in London (also a librarian and Ransome fan), and I hope to emigrate within a year or two if suitable work can be found. I'm also active in societies concerned with fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien (with whom Arthur Ransome corresponded about *The Hobbit*).

Richard Evans, Burbank CA (July, 1991)

SWALLOWS, AMAZONS AND ME

I'm not sure but I may be the only Englishman who is a member of the American branch of the Arthur Ransome Society but this English-man certainly did mean to go to sea.

I started reading Arthur Ransome's books as a child in England in the late 1940's. My brother had had "Swallows and Amazons" read to him by his English teacher at school and had immediately got hooked and had spent his pocket money on Ransome's books buying them as fast as he could read them. I, in turn read them after him and can still recollect the sensation of feeling those dark green covers, seeing the now familiar type....and the smell of those Jonathan Cape books still takes me back to my childhood.

Although I've read all the books countless times and know the stories and details inside out I can still remember my first impressions of the Ransome books. The images I had in my mind's eye then are still the images that I have today when I re-read the books.

At the age of eight our family moved to North Wales. My father had taken on a job as estate manager to Lord Mostyn...one of the old Welsh lords who had a vast estate that had been in his family since the days of Henry Tudor. Part of the estate consisted of a lake, small by Coniston standards, but a lake nevertheless. The lake was hidden from public knowledge in the middle of a huge forest.

Lord Mostyn allowed us to visit the lake and make use of the facilities. These included a lovely old boathouse that dated back to the 1800's, old wooden jetties, a couple of very sorry looking dinghies and free run of the place!

Many years of my childhood were spent at 'The Lake'. My brother, sister, myself and friends camped out in the old boathouse in our home-made sleeping bags, falling asleep to the crackle of the fire. We fished. We even caught pike in a place immediately named Shark Bay. We made canoes. One night we set up leading lights and sailed out into the lake and straight back into the boathouse, the lights guiding our way home safely.

Visits were made to the Lake District, to Coniston and Windermere and the thrill of being 'where it happened' was always there. We would look at Arthur Ransome's maps and at actual maps of the area and it never seemed to be right so we figured out very early on that some artistic licence had been used by Mr. Ransome. But it didn't seem to matter.

When I was nine my brother, Brian, nine years my senior and very much a combination of Captains John, Nancy and Flint, took my sister and me on a Norfolk Broads holiday...an old yacht, naturally, complete with quant and awning...another Teasel. Over the years we made several trips to the Broads, each time with Big Six and Coot Club to read, and identified the many Ransome places. And today we still go at every opportunity.

Some five years ago Brian decided it was time to really go and find the places in the books. He had moved back to Manchester and was now closer than ever to the Lakes. Being a person who never ever throws anything away in case it might come in useful (the

Death & Glory's would be proud of him) he came across a book on boat building that he had bought in 1948 at the age of twelve and thought that perhaps now was the time to build that boat. So, using the thirty-eight year old plans he set about building Sinbad... named after Bridget's kitten. Sinbad was launched on Coniston Water on Christmas Day 1988. Christmas Dinner consisted of turkey soup and sandwiches in the boat moored in the middle of the lake! By summer of 1989 the mast had been carved and the sail made. By the end of September we made our first voyage to Wild Cat Island landing in the secret harbour. Provisions and grog were brought ashore slung from an oar and lunch was consumed at the camp site ...pemmican, grog (ginger beer) and tea. The iron kettle boiled on the Primus (no fires allowed).

Since that wonderful day we have visited all the known places in Mr. Ransome's books. Swallowdale has been searched for endlessly...the fells having been combed many times and we all believe that no-one has yet found the 'real' Swallowdale...many likely contenders though.

We still visit the Broads. Brian last month finally bought a riverside cottage at Brundall and named it Swallowdale. You see, he did find it. Secret Water is always a place to visit. We are very lucky to be able to stay at the Witches Cottage and, yes, it really does have a cracked windowpane. And now it also has an eel totem carved by the captain of Sinbad.

Sinbad has sailed in all the Ransome waters, the Lakes, the Broads and Secret Water many times. We've seen a coots nest each year in exactly the spot where no.7 nested once. Are they descendants, we wonder? Each year the number of Hullabaloo's increases and each year much fist-waving goes on!

Living in America I sometimes miss all those magic places but having twelve hardback books (thirteen including Coots In The North) close at hand (and twelve paperbacks for travelling) I'm soon transported back.

My wife and I got married at the beginning of May on the island of Kauai in Hawaii. Brian could not make the trip. But his telegram was plain and simple. It read:

'Better bound than lovers if not lovers won't bind'

Post Script--The following is taken from Mr. Evans' July 2, 1991, letter to Mrs. Tillinghast:

I remember a couple of years ago leaning on a gate close to the Witches Cottage with my elder brother (also a big AR fan) watching the sun set and the tide come in over the Wade. An American tourist pushing his bicycle stopped to say 'hello' and my brother remarked to him "You'll be looking for Mastodon tracks, I expect". The tourist's face lit up with recognition. It turned out he was a life-long AR fan and was touring England on his bicycle searching for and seeing for the first time all the places he'd read about.

Mrs. Carolyn M. Jones, Columbia MO (August, 1991)

(Written on 11 August, 60th anniversary of the climb to the top of Kanchenjunga)

I discovered the AR books in the 1940's. The first one I read was The Big Six, and then I read the rest of them. I was born in London (my parents were Americans who lived over there in the 20's and 30's). I spent most of my youth in New York City and Atlanta, Ga. I liked to read books by English authors and/or with an English setting. So I found the AR books most appealing. I also enjoyed the outdoor setting and activities. These were quite a contrast to the urban environment I lived in. I also liked these books because the girls in the stories were as important and skillful as the boys.

When I married and had children I introduced both of my sons to AR, and they both enjoyed the books. It was at this time that I started buying the books. I picked up copies at used book stores and/or library book sales. I now have 2 complete sets--one for each son. The first grand child in the family is due in December and I expect to introduce him/her to AR and the wonderful world of the Swallows and Amazons.

I have been back to England in 61, 86, 89, and 90. In 61 my husband and I visited the Norfolk Broads. I have never been to the Lake District. but I hope to do so next year.

For many years I thought I was the only person in the U.S. who knew and read and loved the Ransome books. I am glad to know that there are others who share this interest.

My husband is a college professor at a college in a nearby town, and I am the Director of the library at a small liberal arts college here in Columbia.

What do TARS members think of AR's illustrations for the books? I rather like the American editions of the first 6 books which were illustrated by Helene Carter and Mary E. Shepard (Pigeon Post). The maps and illustrations H. Carter did for Coot Club are outstanding.

Alan Truelove, Quantum Research, Falls Church VA (September 1991)

We are a small (partly family-staffed) software company founded (by me) in 1974, a prime contractor to USAF, etc. We have all the books, bios., commentaries and both videos. I have attempted to introduce AR to the 2nd (and 3rd) generation with varying degrees of success.

Around '47 (when I was 12 or so) I got my father to take me camping to Secret Water, Pin Mill, and the Lakes, and have continued this tradition ever since with my own kids.

In Summer, 1990, my son Graham and his wife Margaret climbed Kanchenjunga, (back route) hiking all the way from their B & B in Torver, and took 360 degree photos from the top on a very clear day.

Some of us hope to attend the 1992 convention at Newby Bridge.

Robert K. Barcus, Spokane WA (October, 1991)

TARS Overseas Member No. 589

I was seven years old when "Swallows and Amazons" was first published.

My mother was widowed in 1930 with two boys to raise, so I am a true child of the Great American Depression. By some blessed miracle, the public library in Santa Monica, California, acquired each of AR's books as they came out. I read them in the proper sequence, and was able to share vicariously all 'the adventures of the Walkers, Blacketts, Ds, and Death & Glories through these borrowed treasures.

In a few years I learned enough from the books to pass myself off as a sailor when the Star Class owners assembled on Santa Monica Pier for the regular Sunday races. Occasionally a skipper whose crew failed to show up would impress me for that service, and eventually I became a regular who was even allowed to take the tiller if my boat had fallen hopelessly behind.

During World War II I was in the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps. I spent three months at a basic school in San Mateo, California, learning seamanship, navigation, ship construction, oarsmanship, and other maritime subjects. Then I was away a year in a Liberty ship shuttling between Australia and New Guinea. We were bombed twice with only minor damage, aground once and strafed from the air on an uncharted New Guinea reef, and finally sent home when the weeds on our bottom reduced our laden speed to seven knots.

The final year of training was at the academy in King's Point, New York, where I sailed the magnificent yachts (up to 90 feet) lent to the academy for the duration. I got my Third Mate's licence and went into the U.S. Navy as an Ensign. I was in the Philippines in an attack transport staging for the invasion of Japan when The Bomb mercifully delivered me and my shipmates from possible Death without Glory.

After the War, I became a mining engineer and worked all over the U.S. and in several foreign countries. I retired to bicycling, golf, travel, and occasional sailing in 1982. My wife and I have owned only one boat, a 14' lap strake sloop forty years ago, but every year we charter a boat and sail for a week through the San Juan Islands of Washington's Puget Sound.

In 1974, I was navigator in a 3-man crew who sailed a Fisher 25 ketch from Long Beach, California, around the tip of Baja, California, and up the Sea of Cortez to Guaymas. Every other winter I teach a night school course in celestial navigation to aspiring yachtsmen, and several of my students have gone on to long voyages on blue water.

I have two daughters whose names, significantly, are Susan and Nancy. They were exposed to the Ransome books, became passable if not enthusiastic sailors, and have moved on to careers in surgery (Susan) and electrical engineering (Nancy).

Susan has two rambunctious daughters of her own, who are currently 8 and 6 and have never yet been sailing! In another year or two, we expect them to settle down enough that they'll be neither duffers nor drowned when their grandmother and I take them with us on a San Juan cruise. And that's when I expect to start them on Swallows & Amazons.

It should be obvious that AR had a profound effect upon my life. The children in his books when I read them were my contemporaries. They were real people to me and I shared their adventures with them. Collectively they were good role models for a developing child.

Without AR, it is possible I might never have gone sailing at all. And without the sailing background, I might even have ended up in the Army (ugh!) during the war instead of geeing the world from the deck of a ship and sailing yachts on Long Island Sound.

And my daughters would undoubtedly have had different names.

Dr. John D. Forbes, Charlottesville VA (February, 1992)

OF THE WORLD'S RANSOM(E)

I became aware of the Swallows & Amazons canon late in life. At my son's rambling, shingled, summer "cottage" on Greening's Island off Southwest Harbor, Maine, there was a bookshelf with two complete sets of the S & A series, one set in hard cover, the other in paperback. These, I learned belonged to my grandson, Alex.

I picked up and started to read Swallows & Amazons. It was not a case of love at first sight. After a few pages, Commander Walker's telegram turned up authorizing the expedition by boat to Wild Cat Island. My reaction was: so this nautical character thinks that if children aged 12, 10, 8, etc. can't work a sailing dinghy, they're better off drowned. The man is an ass. So I put the book down and it stayed down for several years.

The next attempt may have been We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea. That was much better. Very much better. In fact, it turned out to be a classic in the great tradition of Captains Courageous, Otto of the Silver Hand, and The Lost Prince.

The S & A books are uneven. We Didn't Mean towers above the rest. At the bottom is Missy Lee, which only just noses out Picts & Martyrs. Number two may be Swallowdale. I feel muddy all the way through Secret Water.

The characters are a mixed bag, too. John Walker is the prize of the lot, really a dear boy. I like Titty, though, speaking as a dowser, I don't see why she made such heavy weather out of finding that waterhole.

Peggy Blackett's lack of gumption exasperated me because somebody should have beaten down her bossy elder sister, Nancy. Nancy was a gracious loser in a boat race, you've got to give her that. In other respects and circumstances, she was a pain in the neck. No, her concern for her mother vis-a-vis the Great Aunt was very thoughtful.

But my un-favorite character is Roger, that gluttonous monster of insensitivity. He's right in there with the birds egg feller and the unspeakable George who made life so miserable for everybody on the Broads. The bespectacled and bookish Dick is most appealing.

Captain Flint is a nice man.

With all the ups and downs and assorted vagaries, the series are still great reading aloud, and the people, whether you like them or not, are real people and always spoken of as acquaintances at our house.

Nancy Hunt Bowman, Bonita Springs FL (December, 1992)

I'm an elderly widow (66 in two months' time), a retired writer and editor for the Chicago Tribune, and an instrument-rated private pilot. I've been a foreign correspondent in the Middle East and a combat correspondent in Vietnam. I've written about Hollywood stars and an assortment of medical topics with lots of slice-by-slice descriptions of surgery. I've covered the Chicago Symphony and the architecture of Louis Sullivan and children's television shows. I've accompanied cops on drug raids and firemen as they entered burning buildings (to the considerable annoyance of the firemen). I've pontificated on everything imaginable and known very little about any of it.

My third-grade teacher read "Swallows and Amazons" aloud to us, and I was immediately enthralled. I quickly devoured every Arthur Ransome book in the New Haven public library, and there were a good many. But I read them too young and too fast and soon forgot most of them, though "Swallows and Amazons" remained firmly rooted in my head. I never read them to my three children because it never occurred to me that the books were still in print or that they held any value to anyone but me. About 20 years ago in England, I came across a whole slew of AR paperbacks in a store, including "Swallows and Amazons," which I bought. I later wished I'd bought the whole bunch, but at the time I wasn't sure that the cast of characters would exercise the same charms for me. They still did, however.

The life on the lake was very different from my own and very much more pleasant. Unlike my cold and disapproving mother, the children's mother was loving, supportive, willing and able to enter into their games. Unlike my bullying older sisters, the children were nice to each other, polite, fairminded. The stories were erected on timbers of civility, good manners, and freedom to choose. "Better drowned than duffers," as the telegram said, "if not duffers won't drown." What terrific parents!

I've taken my own chances on drowning often enough. When I was a child, my mother packed me off to summer camp intending that I should learn tennis, which she considered a social asset. She appeared not to have known that the camp stressed sailing. For two summers I contrived to avoid the tennis courts except when all of us were turned out to weed them. I spent all my time on or in the water. I learned to swim an Australian crawl, row a boat, paddle a canoe, and sail any of a small fleet of sailboats, in particular two 16-foot Cape Cod Knockabouts; Later as an adult, I raced Stars, Lightnings, Comets, 110s, Snipes -- anything where I could wangle a berth as crew. I sailed in offshore sailing races too, notably the Mackinac Island race. All of this frenetic watery action had its roots, I believe, aboard Swallow and Amazon.

Later still, I learned to fly and gradually turned my back on boats except to run the outboard when my husband went fishing. I'm sure the Swallows, the Amazons, and Mr. Ransome would have disparaged my apostasy in deserting sail for a 25-horsepower Evinrude, and I have since corrected this moral lapse. I am now awaiting delivery of a collapsible kayak, but at least it won't render the sky hideous with the fumes and noise of internal combustion.

Robert S. Montgomery, North Royalton, Ohio (Autumn, 1993)

I am a retired businessman, my hobbies are collector cars (Buicks) and playing the bagpipes. I am a native of northeast Ohio, but now spend my winters in Sarasota Fla.

I first discovered Arthur Ransome as a boy of 10 or 11 in 1938 or 1939. I lived in a semi-rural area and not having many playmates I spent a lot of time roaming the woods and fields with my dog and reading. One day at the library I found Swallows and Amazons! It was love at first reading, these children had adventures like those I imagined and many more. I read and reread all of the series that the library had, most of them many times.

I grew up found other interests and did not think too much about the books for many years, however I never forgot them either. A couple of years ago as my grandchildren began to approach the age of ten I thought of Swallows and Amazons and decided to try to find the books in hopes that they would prove to be as exciting to my grandchildren as they had been to me.

With the help of a friend who is a research librarian, several book dealers and an English cousin in Cheshire I have collected the set of twelve. It still remains to be seen if my grandchildren will like them, but I am extremely happy to have rediscovered Arthur Ransome and am reading the series again with as much joy as I did 55 years ago.

In one of the books I recently got from my Cheshire cousin there was information about The Arthur Ransome Society, I wrote for information and here I am. SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS FOREVER!

Richard D. Evans, Burbank CA (Additional details, Fall, 1993)

I am off back to England for a week long business trip and looking forward very much to a two day trip up to the Broads to stay at my brother's new riverside home at Brundall. He bought it a couple of years ago and it will be my first trip to the house. It's been renamed "Swallowdale." He now keeps his sailing dinghy, Sinbad, down there. He tells me that it's surprising the number of AR related boats one can spot on the Broads. There's a privately owned yacht up at Horning called Peter Duck, a dinghy called Titmouse and he often see the hullabaloo's Margoletta and Sir Garnett (as used in the BBC films.)

In the early 1970s I owned a house about two blocks from AR's London flat (Hurlingham Court) and never knew that that's where

he had once lived. A further coincidence: I have been rereading AR's 'Bohemia in London' written at the turn of the century and, I think, his first published book. In it he mentions moving by horse and cart from his then home in Clapham, south London over the Thames to take up rooms in the Kings Road, Chelsea. In 1976 after I moved from Putney I moved to a house in Clapham in the same street. Every day on my way to work I would retrace AR's journey from Clapham through Battersea to Chelsea and his description of the streets and buildings hasn't changed in ninety years. I don't know if this book is available in the U.S. but it's a marvelous account of London life at the turn of the century. It's strange that I seemed to have followed AR round London over the years!

This all finally came to a head in 1988 when I bought my current flat in Little Venice on the Regents Canal, close to Paddington. The elderly couple who sold me the flat had been friends of AR's and the Collingwoods, and the wife claimed that she and her sister could have been the inspiration for the Blackett girls! The flat was adorned with paintings and drawings of the Lakes, some by W.G. Collingwood himself. I was shown some wonderful sepia photographs of the wife as a child playing with her sister, AR and the Collingwoods up at Coniston. To bring the tale full circle, after I bought the flat I remodeled it, during which time I gave a lot of the old shelving timbers etc. to my brother. He never throws anything away and loves to reuse old wood and fittings etc. So in due course the shelf timbers became the mid and stern thwarts in Sinbad. "Peggy's shelves," he'll mutter with great pride when asked about the building of Sinbad.

David C. Thewlis, Eureka CA (Winter 1993-94)

I'm in my early 50s. By profession I am a computer consultant and technology futurist. My hobbies are books, medieval historical recreation, aircraft and modeling, travel, and a growing and necessary interest in historical preservation. My wife and I live in Eureka, a town of about 25,000 on the north coast of California about 300 miles north of San Francisco, where we own and are restoring a 1901 transitional Victorian/Edwardian home (hence the "necessary" interest in historical preservation!) Susan, my wife, is a graphics designer, illustrator and painter, and also the current president of the Eureka Heritage Society.

I grew up in the Washington D.C. area (suburban Maryland) and found the Ransome novels in the local library when I was about ten years old. I have always been fond of English children's novels, and the Ransome books certainly helped to establish or feed that interest. Although I learned about sailing from Ransome, I was never in a sailboat until I learned to sail on the Wannsee in Berlin in the early 1960s when I was stationed there in the Air Force. After my service, I moved to California and entered data processing as a career, which I've largely done since then. I've never had much luck finding anybody else who has read the Ransome books (until last summer, that is), although they are always in libraries.

I didn't return to Europe until 1982, when I attended a computer conference and remembered how much I had enjoyed Germany. Finally, in 1985 my son (then 14, and also a Ransome fan) and I visited Germany and the U.K. for several weeks, and spent three very rainy days in the Lake District, hoping to see where the Ransome stories had been set and if we could discover anything more about them. We were also hoping to find information on the BBC "Swallows and Amazons Forever" movie made in the late 1970s, scenes from which appeared on the cover of a Puffin edition of "Swallows and Amazons".

At that time, I had not stumbled across any of the "external" information about Ransome; we had only what we remembered from the books to guide us. We took a boat trip on Windermere, speculated on whether an island we saw might be the origin of Wildcat Island (it was Blake Holme, so we got at least one thing right) and got to visit Belle Island (which was obviously Long Island), which was still open to the public. We visited the Steamboat Museum, and saw Esperance. So our short visit was exciting, but we were certain there was more there to find, if only we'd had the time, or a little more information. The day before we left the U.K. I found Hugh Brogan's Biography of Arthur Ransome, and Ransome's Autobiography, in a booksellers in England; on the flight home I found out how close we had been!

Two years later my wife and I visited England, and I was able to rent a small boat on Coniston and find the Secret Harbor on Peel Island for myself; visit Ransome's grave; and visit the Kendal Museum (where I saw Ransome's study, but of course didn't find TARS). Since then, I've found Christina Hardyment's and Roger Wardale's books, and we returned again to the U.K. but I had no time to pursue Ransome interests. In the summer of 1993, however, we visited the Lake District once more and stayed at Banerigg House on Grasmere, where the proprietors, Martin and Angela Clark, knew a bit about Ransome and about a lady who had stayed with them while researching her book recently. They told us about the S&A movie being shown fairly regularly in Bowness, but it wasn't while we were there.

One afternoon, returning briefly to Banerigg House, we were greeted by Angela announcing "She's here! She was passing through and stopped for tea." "She" turned out to be Claire Kendall-Price whose book I had bought that morning in Grasmere. We had a wonderful talk with Claire, who autographed my book, told us about TARS and subsequently got me the information about how to join TARS, which I have now done. And I finally got a chance to see Amazon at the Steamboat Museum.

Now, it turns out that not only will we be in the U.K. next summer, but the timing is such that I should be able to be in the Lake District for the Annual TARS event. So I'm very much looking forward to that. What I haven't been able to do, unfortunately, is find a copy of that BBC movie. Apparently it's never been sold on video, and though there may be a few "pirate" copies running around the U.K., it isn't available.

So there's a not-so-brief bio, and a Ransome story largely of looking for things before I knew how to find them!

Janet, Peter, and Molly O'Neill, Redding, CA (Autumn, 1994)

I'm Janet O'Neill, the designated family biographer. This story really involves all of us equally, so the fact I'm writing it in no way suggests my role is in any way bigger than that of the others!

I'm a journalist by profession, currently working a bit less than full time for Redding's only daily newspaper. For years I worked as a reporter, editor, features writer and photograph depending on where I was, until in late 1993 I decided it was time to slow down, spend more time with Molly and fiddle around with fiction writing. Molly has fared better than the fiction writing, but I've loved finally having time to get to know her better. I've worked part time for the past year, but am temporarily back at the paper almost full time while one of our features writers is on maternity leave.

Peter teaches middle school, specifically seventh-grade English, reading and social studies. He's been at it about six years, having gone back to school after being self-employed as a general contractor in the summer and fishing guide in the winter. His specialty is carpentry, and one year he built an 8-foot sailing dinghy. We were deep into "Wind in the Willows" at the time, so it was christened the "Minnow". Peter has enjoyed a lifelong interest in sailing, and in the mid-1970's crewed on a 38-foot ketch-rigged trimaran from Hawaii to California.

Molly is a 10-year-old fifth-grader active on the swim team. She's just finished her first soccer season and plans to start basketball in January. She's also a voracious reader and spends much of her life in the company of a book.

As it turns out, Molly was our link to Arthur Ransome. Last Christmas my uncle, in his 60's and recently retired from a career in the astronomy department at UC Berkeley, gave her a copy of "Swallows and Amazons". We'd never heard of it, but he had fond recollections of reading the series as a child. His daughter, Cynthia, has also read the series, and the books mean a great deal to her too.

What followed was remarkable. Soon Peter and I were involved, and we ended up in the Lake District in August at the Red Lion pub in Lowick Bridge with several TARS members from Britain and Japan. Included in the group was Dick Kelsall, which was especially meaningful as Dick had been Uncle David's favorite character in the books. Everyone was exceedingly kind to us and generous with their time. The next day we scaled Kanchenjunga and saw the plaque honoring AR that's since been removed to Holly Howe. Also, we visited the "Amazon" in Bowness, the Ransome room in Abbot Hall in Kendal, and Ransome's grave in Rusland.

We'd had considerable difficulty obtaining the books prior to our trip, so filled out our set in England. Molly has completed the series, and Peter isn't far behind. I'm in third place. So far I like Titty best.

Jane Laninga, Kailua, HI (Spring, 1995)

I really cannot recall how I first met Arthur Ransome's delightful characters. Since I do not own a copy of S&A I suspect I read it first as a library book. I do recall, like Ellen Tillinghast, that at first glance I presumed the book to be about birds in South Am. How glad I am that I was interested enough in birds in S.A. to pick up S&A! Thereafter I was hooked. I read and reread the other books as they were issued in paperback in the early 70's by Penguin Books. All my books are in England; how I wish I had them with me now! Three cheers for Robert Barcus and his letter to National Geographic, because that is how I first heard of TARS. Up until then I had never met another person who recognized the name Arthur Ransome and to whom the books meant so much. Pleased to meet you all!

Let me tell you something about myself. I was born in Australia but went to school in County Durham, England, just over the Pennines from the Lake District, from the age of 10. I met my husband, who is an artillery officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, six years ago when he was working at the American Embassy in Amman, Jordan and I was working at the British Embassy there. We are on a 3-year posting to the Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe Bay on the Windward side of Oahu, about 15 miles from Honolulu, and loving every minute of it. We have one year left--if any members are passing through, please feel free to get in touch. I think we are pretty good at being tour guides.

At the moment I am a senior, majoring in accounting at the U. of Hawaii. My graduation is projected for May of '96, and shortly afterwards we will be transferred to another post, we know not where. Then I shall be looking for a job in the tax side of accounting. Military life is never dull, if one enjoys traveling and seeing new places and if one is prepared to take the good along with the bad. By the time we leave Hawaii my husband will have been away from home for half of the three years we spend here.

So back to AR. My mother, who was left alone with myself and a younger brother to care for, often would load up the car with camping gear, and off we would go over the Pennines to camp in farmers' fields in the Lake District. I distinctly remember the first time we went driving down the winding road which approaches Ullswater and wondering how she knew the way. Later I realized that she didn't know the way; she was exploring! Over the years our camping gear became more sophisticated and our knowledge of the Lakes more comprehensive. I recall always taking a home-made fruitcake with us. "Yuk!" the Americans will say. "Ah, but this was English fruitcake," I say, "and quite different to that stuff everyone makes jokes about in America." Jolly convenient stuff it is too; keeps for ages in England's climate, travels well without crumbling, and can be cut into chunks to be eaten out of your hand with a large mug of hot tea. (Recipe upon request.)

My acquaintance with the Swallows and Amazons began after I had visited the Lakes several times. I was delighted to meet such a charming group whose adventures took place in the very same Lakes I visited. I wanted to be a Swallow and have adventures like theirs. In this day of violence and viciousness, the Swallows and Amazons are genuinely nice and decent people who have some exciting adventures without swearing, vandalism or mugging anybody. How novel! I was always very impressed with the relationships of the Walkers to each other as well as the Blacketts to each other. My brother and I were brought up to be caring and civil to each other like they were. For a long time I thought we were the only siblings in the world who didn't constantly bicker and fight.

My brother and I longed for a sailing dingy so we too could camp on an island, and eventually we got a Wayfarer which is now

stored in Mum's garage in England since my brother is living in Australia. I'm sure one of us will one day get it out again and trundle it over the mountains to launch it on one of those beautiful lakes. Such a lot of our childhood was spent there and such a lot of our good memories are bound to the Lakes. My brother says he gets homesick for the Lakes, not for the small market town where our mother lives (James Herriot country for all you Anglophiles). I remember how humiliated we were the time our tent blew down one windy day. I remember Bobby, our Bearded Collie, who died earlier this year at the grand old age of 17, never thought much of the camping lark. He preferred to sleep in the car, but he adored boats of all shapes and sizes, and was always the first one to get his feet wet in the icy water of the Lakes. I remember climbing the Old Man of Coniston for the first time. Mum was petrified of heights, but she never told us. I can picture her now as she came face to face with a Border Collie stepping surefootedly down the mountain, while, with her hands on the ground, she clambered up those last few steep feet to the top. So you see TARSUS is a nostalgia trip for me, and next time I go home to England I shall be bringing my AR books back with me. Perhaps if I put them in our living room bookcase someone will ask a question about them, and I can tell them all about TARSUS. Thank you, Arthur Ransome, for so many good memories and such good yarns. Swallows and Amazons forever!

Betty Jo Baerg, Lincoln, CA (Spring, 1996)

My trip to the U.K. in 1988 was a dream come true. I visited as many of the Swallows & Amazons sites as possible. Discovered Christina Hardyment's and Roger Wardale's books while in the Lake District, and they helped me find Holly Howe (Bank Ground Farm), where I met Lucy Batty, the current owner, who was so gracious to me.

I cannot describe how I felt as I caught my first glimpse of Lake Windermere, Coniston Water, and Peel Island (otherwise known as Wild Cat Island!). I brought home a little bottle of Coniston Water, so I can stick my finger in it whenever I like. I never expected to see it all again, so it was a thrill to find myself at a barbecue on Wild Cat. Island in 1991 with other TARS members. To sit on the Amazon and the houseboat was something I had never even dreamed of getting to do--but I did! Low Ludderburn is privately owned, so I was very fortunate to get to visit it. I stood inside the barn where AR began the Swallows & Amazons series. He wrote "I used to hate everything else I had to do (except fishing and sailing), and I used to get away into my room in the top of the old barn and wonder what was going to happen and how." At night he would take the manuscript to his bedroom, so that he could reach out and touch its cover as it lay beside him in the dark.

Rusland Church Yard was as green and isolated and peaceful as when AR saw it and said he would like to be buried there under a particular tree, with the sound of the wind in the pine needles. In his book "Racundra's First Cruise" he said, "Master and Owner of the Racundra--in moments of humiliation, those are the words I shall whisper to myself for comfort. I ask no others on my grave." But they are not there. . . I know because I looked.

I found Pin Mill all by myself in 1988 and explored it between rain showers. Bought several books at the Yacht Chandlers next door to Alma Cottage. When I had the people who sold them to me autograph them, they said it made them feel like celebrities.

I read my first book by Arthur Ransome before I was ten, and then all the books to my own six children as they were growing up. My father ran summer camps for children all my childhood, and we camped and hiked a lot, which is probably why they appealed to me so much. I was reading "Swallows and Amazons" aloud to my children for the umpteenth time the evening I received the call that my father had been killed in an automobile accident. Now I am reading the books to my grandchildren.

Was thrilled to purchase a copy of the video of "Swallows & Amazons" in London in 1991, but had to have it converted to the U.S. system before I could see it, of course. I never was able to visit the Norfolk Broads, but the videos "Coot Club" and "Big Six" have given wonderful glimpses of that area. They all follow the books quite closely.

It would be wonderful to go back to the real places, but if I never make it again, I still have all the books. And they have a way of taking me there again and again!

Alan J. Truelove, Annandale, VA (Additional Details, Spring, 1996)

WH was read to us in school in England when I was 9, in 1944. I was put off by the references to the North Pole, not realising this was just a name, but subsequently read all the books. I then dragged my Father on camping trips to the SW, WD, and Lake District locations, having the usual difficulty in finding Beckfoot (but, as a result, finding the really great bathing beach at the top left of Windermere, which has served us for 60+ years). My Dad inscribed the books with an account of these trips, and the practice of dragging spouses and children to the Lakes (and further inscribing the original hard-cover books) has been followed by (so far) two complete generations--e.g. my son Graham dragged his new wife to the top of Kanchenjunga, the long way from Torver. Our favorite site is Tilberthwaite Quarry/Carpark near Coniston (PP area); Dogs' Home is next on our list. Our hotel of choice is Kirkstone Foot Country Hotel in Ambleside.

My youngest kids are made--with some protest--to read from the books on long car trips, and this is a good way of learning some new words and englishisms.

I suspect it is only a matter of time before an AR Web page is started, and I'm willing to help. (Or do the whole thing.)

Tom Grimes, Muncie, IN (Spring, 1996)

It has been a long time since I first read S&A--I was in the second grade then, and I am 60 now. I lived in Detroit, Michigan at the time, and the branch library that was three long blocks from my home would issue a library card to any child who could sign his or her

name. I read all of the books then several times, as I remember. I was just old enough to receive a copy of GN? for Christmas when it was newly published.

The children and their adventures were very real to me then. Fully as real was the dream of having a boat and sailing. It took me until I was in my late thirties to realize that dream. By that time my own children were young. I found used copies of S&A, SD, and WD and read them to my children. I filled out my collection with Godine paperbacks as far as I could and bought the rest on a trip to Canada. One thing that I'm looking for now is a cheap supply of paperback copies of S&A to give to the young children of friends.

I would have liked to have had sailing, exploring, and camping adventures like the Walkers and the Blacketts, but the important thing was the sailing--all the rest went along with that. When I was eleven, my parents moved to a small town just outside Dallas, Texas, and that pretty well put an end to any dreams of sailing. After that college, work, and a family took all of the time and money. It wasn't until I was in my late thirties that I was able to buy an old dinghy, fix it up, and learn to sail.

I still sail. I've had several small boats, and I've been fortunate enough to be able to take the latest one to northwest lower Michigan each summer for the last ten years. I sleep on the boat and sail from harbor to harbor probably much as AR did on the east coast of England. The weather on Grand Traverse Bay is far more pleasant (at least in the summer) than it is on the North Sea coast, though.

Another dream that I've had is to go to England and see the places that AR wrote about and set his stories in. It is very interesting to know from the TARS publications that I can really find those places and see them for myself. I particularly want to see Amazon and the harbor on "Wildcat Island" and Pin Mill and the Nancy Blackett. One day I'll do it.

Marilyn Marshall, Larchmont, NY (Spring, 1996)

My introduction to Arthur Ransome came as an adult. On a visit to London in the mid-1980's I spent two nights in a B&B in Camden Town owned by a couple whose children were grown. I slept in a child's room, no more than 6 or 7 feet square, where one wall was filled with children's books. Hard cover editions with the jackets still intact. Needless to say, I spent a few happy hours poking through the books. It was there that I discovered the Jonathan Cape editions of Ransome's novels. I read the first few pages of Swallows & Amazons and was hooked. At the first opportunity I bought the Puffin edition in Hatchard's and, as my trip in England progressed, bought a few more. Of the twelve books, We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea is my favorite. I've also read Racundra's First Cruise, and Christina Hardyment's Arthur Ransome and Capt. Flint's Trunk. I discovered TARS while browsing through The Encyclopedia of Associations.

My immediate reaction to the books was that they were the idealized childhood of the author. The children seemed to be very responsible and adept at the things they did, whether it was sailing, camping or feeding themselves. As the youngest of five children who grew up in the Indiana countryside, I had many adventures with my older brother and sisters, but we weren't quite so organized about it. Although we lived within half a mile of where the rather unsalubriously named river, Burns Ditch, meets Lake Michigan, we weren't sailors. Our Dad had a motor boat which he used for fishing and that was the extent of our life on the water. We may have had too many distractions -- the square mile that contained our house also included the beach on Lake Michigan, the docks on the river, sand dunes, corn and soy bean fields, a few impressive shade trees on our lawn, forest and a macadam road which was ideal for bicycle riding. We read a lot and embarked on many adventures -- specifically hunting for evidence of the Potawatami village that reputedly existed near our home many moons ago. Had we read Ransome, what kind of adventures would we have had?! Hard to tell. But as an adult, the books inspire me to pursue my small passions for all the enjoyment they deliver.

Ransome got the kid politics right. The hierarchies and frustrations among children (especially siblings in large families) are complex and he manages to be faithful to that important aspect of childhood. But he elevates childhood experience by the purpose and drama he gives to the activities of the children. It is interesting to me that although he never had children of his own, he was able to be a parent through his books by providing his readers with a guide to having a productive and fascinating adolescence. He is careful (most of the time) to show that the children are acting with parental permission, and, best of all, they manage to live their lives free of teenage angst.

On the whole, Ransome made a very worthy contribution to the literature of young people and his books deserve to be wider known -- aside from TARSUS, I have never met anyone who has read his books. As an organization, we should perhaps adopt as our mission the introduction of Ransome to new readers. I see that some of our members are librarians (I'm a librarian turned technical writer). If anyone is interested in brainstorming this idea, please drop me a line or send an e-mail to marshal21@ix.netcom.com.

Vance Bradley, Port St. Lucie, FL (December, 1996)

The following is excerpted from a letter that Mr. Bradley wrote to The TARS Secretary in September, 1996

The Secretary, TARS, Friday, September 6, 1996

I have been reading Arthur Ransome on Fishing rather than catching up on my correspondence as I am supposed to be doing. Ransome, even as told by Jeremy Swift has that effect on me. My wife, to her credit, is far less apt to shirk our responsibilities with such self-indulgences, much less allow me to. She has, in fact, given me about her number 3 basilisk stare on the subject of untended letters (a number 6 stare is reputed to turn hapless recipients to stone). So, to work!

By way of introduction, let me just tell you briefly that my wife and I are natives of Tennessee, are Florida immigrants of long standing, and have done some exploring ourselves over the years. I have been lucky enough to spend a fair portion of my working life

at, and under the sea. My childhood as a wild indian on the rivers, lakes, creeks, quarries and whatever else came to hand in Tennessee have stood me in good stead and, as I get older (we are 49 each this year), I find that my interests are waning from the jillion dollar submersibles and ships, and back toward those smaller (and quieter) pleasures of my childhood. The last dozen and a half years, I have worked ashore, but at least ashore near the shore so that we may continue to potter about on the water doing a little fishing, a little diving, a little sailing, and a lot of not much at all (as being on the water is sufficient excuse, generally speaking).

I stumbled across the first of Ransome's children's books (ha!) almost by accident (they are being reprinted quite nicely, 1 per year, by the Godine group in Boston). I phoned the American group number listed in my first book and spoke with a very pleasant and genuinely enthusiastic Mrs. Tillinghast in Vermont. She seemed to be a sort of TARS secretary for the US. She was preparing for a trip abroad and we unfortunately lost touch. Since that time, my family has been contending with a chronically ill daughter (now on the mend) and there the matter lay until this year when time and energy were once more available in sufficient quantity to allow me to think of something other than emotional and fiscal water treading. (Not until you can float on your back without one foot on the bottom, Roger). Unfortunately, when next I attempted to contact the lady in Vermont she was, alas, "... unknown at this number" -- moved away, I suspected, or worse -- and me with a trip to England upcoming! Well, never mind. Things have a way of working out.

Speaking of our vacation to the UK.... We managed three days on the Broads as it turned out; one ashore at Horning and two afloat on the Bure and the Ant. I know that many people have wandered around with Ransome's books in hand and a smile on their collective faces, and I did the same. I certainly don't begrudge the company, either. It was great fun.

On another note, are plans, line drawings and/or offsets available for the original Swallow? I am what is wryly termed a recreational boatbuilder in my spare time and want to build a sailing and rowing skiff for use in teaching my 4-year old grandson (and reacquainting his mother with, perhaps?) the ways of the water. Our family sloop is too large for what I have in mind. We live on the East coast of Florida near the broad Indian River Lagoon and there are, quite literally, miles and miles of winding rivers and backwaters, mangrove edged marshes, a gross or so of small islands and dozens of tiny beaches where no one but a small explorer and his doting grandfather might have ever set foot. One needs a sturdy little boat for such expeditions to the wilderness, of course -- ours will probably fly the Swallow flag regardless of her hull form -- but it would be very nice to have Swallow herself (or a close cousin). It might be just the ticket for us. - I have, in fact, a set of plans in hand for a lovely little knockabout sloop of 14-feet with centerboard that would serve perfectly well, but wouldn't it be fun to have one like the original? I may be running the risk of surrounding myself, as they say, with insurmountable opportunities, but the project appeals to me more and more as I think about it. I shall hold up on the 14-footer until I hear from you.

Mr. Bradley supplemented the above with the following from a letter to Dave Thewlis, December 8, 1996

...Let me also add that I did not pursue the plans for Swallow or Amazon this fall, having found a suitable little boat in the interim. So you will know, it is a modified dory-skiff from Harry Bryan's fertile head, modified from the John Gardner semi-dory 14-foot sloop which was the precise boat I mentioned in the letter. This little skiff, which Harry calls "Daisy" is 12 1/2 feet long, modified to carry the boomed lug rig so beloved of AR readers, and should weigh about 130 pounds without rigging. Wish me luck, as it is the first planked boat I have tried. Harry says go ahead, no problem. Easy for him to say up there in the north woods somewhere, but I will undertake the little ship this winter and spring, given a few spare minutes and dollars with which to do so.

As to choosing a favorite AR -- no chance! I find something special in each one of them. Have, in fact, just reread the dozen this fall. Familiarity breeds content(ment). Our grandson is a TARS, whether he knows it or not, and likes hearing about the children and the adventures. He keeps looking around the neighborhood, wondering where the Walker children are! At 4, he is not quite ripe for the stories, but the imagination part is in full song already. One hopes the little skiff and the little boy are ready at about the same time.

Charles B. Preston, Manchester, CT (December, 1996)

In 1939, when I was in the sixth grade, the school librarian introduced me to SA. After devouring that first book of Ransome's, it was back to the bookshelves for any others available from the school or public libraries. I clearly remember reading SD, WH and PP. The others, I think, had not found their way to my small Midwestern city (and, of course, some had not yet been written).

Naturally, reading about the children's adventures created the desire to own a sailboat. Finally, in the mid-1970's, I took the step and bought a twenty-five foot sloop. I had a great time with it, but after 5 years I came fully to realize three things: a sailboat requires a lot of work; crew is not always easy to come by; and anyone who waits until almost age 50 to learn to sail is not likely to advance very far beyond the duffer stage. I no longer have the boat, but it was a wonderful experience.

I carried the memory of Ransome's stories in the back of my mind for 50 years, but had no more contact with the books until I discovered, in the late 1980's, that all twelve were currently in print. By shopping several sources, I was able to pick up all of them, and I read them aloud to my granddaughter. Then, in 1993, my wife and I paid a short visit to the Lake District, and were captivated.

The next step was to introduce my wife's niece and two grandnephews to the books. As soon as I had them securely hooked, I proposed that they, my wife, and I join the crowd making pilgrimage to the Lake District to find the Ransome Places. Armed with the books by Christina Hardyment and Claire Kendall-Price (and later, Roger Wardale's book) we spent a week in 1994, and another in 1996, at the Coniston Sun Hotel (a small inn which we highly recommend, at the foot of Kanchenjunga) as a base for exploring the land of Swallows and Amazons. Our finds included High Topps, Slater Bob's Mine, Roger Wardale's Swallowdale and Horseshoe Cove, the Dog's Home, the Igloo, Wildcat (Peel) Island, "Amazon" and "Esperance", Abbot Hall Museum, Ransome's grave, and several farmhouses of the stories.

In 1995, we had "Swallows and Amazons" week at our summer cabin in New Hampshire. Attending were all the above mentioned crew, plus four other young adventurers. Lacking sailing dinghies, we had to settle for sailing canoes, which worked out reasonably well. Other activities were hiking, semaphore, archery, exploring and mapping (as in SW), piratical practice, and a Corroboree (complete with an eel totem and human sacrifice).

Now that I am retired from my career as a financial executive, we have time for adventures like these, and the AR books provide fertile ground for ideas. In 1997 we plan to attend the AGM in The Broads. Then maybe we'll think of other S & A projects -- or start over again. SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS FOR EVER !!

Carlton A. Brown, Newburyport Massachusetts (January, 1997)

It all started when as a boy of ten I was browsing at the town library and the book Swallows and Amazons caught my eye. I can still remember the smell of the pages. I devoured the three or four books that the library had available. I was fascinated by the differences in the use of the English language and in the social interactions of the natives and S&As compared to what I was used to. When I first read the books (probably the 1930 edition because they did not have all the illustrations), they had all been rebound and looked old compared to all the neighboring books. Our library had a habit of culling old books that were not being circulated and therefore I took it upon myself to make sure that I checked each book out at least once every year or two (a practice I continue to perform almost forty years later!). This past year I found that Godine Publishing had reprinted most of the series, and I have bought myself and the library a complete set of what is available.

While writing this resume, I look back and realize what a tremendous influence that AR had on my life. I remember re-reading passages to keep the geography of the story straight and of using maps for the first time. Secret Water fascinated me the most with the mapping of the island. I learned to use a compass to map my youthful world, using Johns methods. I am sure that AR was partly responsible for my becoming a land surveyor, a profession that I still love after twenty- five years.

When I was younger the youthful characters were my role models. I realize now that a most important role model was the way that John and Nancy were equals. For the biggest problems or tasks, it was always John and Nancy handling it together, not just Nancy helping John. When I was 11, 12 and 13 I spent the summer at my parents camp at the biggest lake in New Hampshire with about a dozen kids whose parents had camps in the area. My best friend was a girl the same age as me. We were never boyfriend and girlfriend but were always best friends and allies. Together we would swim, roller skate, play badmitten for hours, explore old trails and mountains in the area. I feel that ARs influence over me was to say it was okay and normal to have a girl as a best friend, to be like John and Nancy.

ARs youthful characters were role models, but I now realize that Uncle Jim and the various parents are the role models that I have strived to follow as an adult. Their non- judgmental approach of allowing the children to do things on their own, allowing them to fail and triumph based on their own decisions must have influenced me in my handling of child, grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

In conclusion, I would like to thank TARS and TARSUS for giving me a forum to finally say THANK YOU to AR for having been such a big part of my life.

Ben Matlick, Sunnyvale, CA (April, 1997)

My name is "Bernard" (rhymes with nerd, not nard!). Until the age of 24 when a new engineer in the B52 Wing Group, I went by the nickname "BUN". This was beyond my Boeing supervisor's capability of understanding so he continually called me "BEN", as did everyone around - so I became Ben. This bothered my parents some, but my (now) wife and kids are glad.

I am now (1997) into my 71st year and retired from Lockheed here in "Silicon Valley". My first memory of giving a book report is on SWALLOWDALE in third grade that went on-&-on. This was in Normal, Illinois (130 miles south of my birthplace Chicago) where I lived through my school years until joining the U.S. Navy upon graduation from High School in 1944. Like every boy, and even some girls, I wanted to fly-- but by that time of the War, what were really needed were infantrymen to march across Europe. So I joined the Navy before turning 18 to keep from being drafted! My sea duty was on a Dock Landing Ship (LSD18) and a Troop Transport (AP115) spent, with the rating of "Fireman", down in the engine room spaces. I did get to see much of the U.S. plus a bit of the Panama Canal, the Philippines and China. The two years in the Navy gave me enough "GI Bill" time to put me through the University of Illinois and end up with an engineering degree plus a private flying license.

The flying license wasn't used much but the engineering education led me to work at Boeing Seattle & Wichita for 2-1/2 years and the Navy Department in Washington D.C. for 9 years helping to redesign the British-invented steam catapults for use aboard U.S. carriers (this may be inaccurate as the inventor Sir Colin Mitchell once sternly informed me, after some gaff of mine, that he was not an Englishman but a Scot!). I ended up at Lockheed Missiles and Space in Sunnyvale, California (to put missiles aboard submarines) and retired after 30 years. I also acquired a wife (in Wash. D.C.), four children, and now, two grandchildren!

Early in our marriage, I persuaded my wife Mary to read each of the Swallows books (I'd ordered a full set from a London bookstore) which she dutifully did, skipping over all the parts having to do with details of sail or boat handling (!). The only one of my children to read all of the books is Sally, my oldest; she is now reading them as a family project with her husband and two children.

My actual experience sailing is minimal: while my parents had a small cabin on an Illinois lake, I only had a metal rowboat to use (but worked as a printer's apprentice nights after high school to get an outboard motor for it). I think that there was only one sailboat on the lake--which I finally managed to get aboard for a nowhere ride with little wind. After the War, I built a small 11-1/2 foot plywood

sailboat from plans in "How To Build 20 Boats" on weekends when not at the college. My Mother made the sail from a surplus WWII parachute; that's when I learned something about "bias" in cloth! The rig was a standing lug type, not unlike Ransome's "Swallow" sketches. "Poco" wasn't a good sailer and my Dad sold her to a fisherman when I left for Boeing.

Although I like to think of myself as knowledgeable about sailing, I find, in my "september" years that real experience is sadly lacking. In the early 50's before marriage, I would spend vacation time sailing out of Camden, Maine on old coastal schooners without engines (you paid and helped sail--but not steer). The ships I sailed on 45 years ago are still available for sailing out of Camden: Mattie and Mercantile. both built in 1916! I also rented sailing dinghies sailing on Lake Washington (Seattle) and the Potomac (Wash. D.C.).

But I entered into the usual ratrace: work-marriage-children-house and suddenly found I was forty-five with a wife, a mortgage, four kids and no BOAT! So we got ourselves a 13 foot "Boston Whaler" (a very fine and much copied outboard boat) with a 40 HP motor that taught the kids (Sally, Brett, Wendy, & Cameron) about boats, about water skiing and about the lakes and Delta of northern California. The Delta is an area east of San Francisco largely created by Chinese laborers after the Transcontinental rail system was completed; it is the junction of the two main state river systems and supplies most of southern California's water. It has characteristics very much like the Norfolk Broads without the windmills. After 16 years or so, the whaler ("Merry H") was no longer powerful enough for the boys--so, with some tears, it was sold. Also by then, the two older kids had gone to college, moved and married (this sounds like a soap). Brett, now 36, recently bought himself a "Mastercraft" special ski-boat with a 250 HP inboard engine. After some training, I was allowed to drive his boat on the Sacramento River--I guess there will be no sailors in this family.

To have something to keep me from television when I retired, I bought a 16-1/2 foot "Com-Pac" sailboat (with trailer, two bunks and porta-pottie) at the 1990 Seattle Boat Show. Mary humored me and helped me drive it down from Seattle. She and the boys (separately) have helped me sail it on a number of the lakes; Cameron even went with me on a windy sail on San Francisco Bay! But, feeling my age, the boat mostly sits on its trailer in my driveway and I'm back to reading, TV, and this exasperating computer.

Mary and I have been to Bowness and the Lake Country twice and hope to go again. But I have trouble with the roads; narrow and lined with sharp slate fences. And tour bus drivers that won't back up--or look you in the eye when there's no room to pass!

I have some "wonder why's" about the Ransome stories:

1) I wonder why Ransome avoids mentioning anything to do with "WC" in any of his books? He does mention "a simple and efficient closet " behind a cupboard on the starboard side in RACUNDRA'S FIRST CRUISE (also shown on the plan in Wardale's NANCY BLACKETT), but all the ship plans in the children's books have no such space. And of course there's nothing on Wild Cat Island or at Swallowdale. Is this because that is standard for children's books, or is this a Victorian holdover?

2) I wonder why no one (but me) apparently sees similarities in the Ransome books with the great English spy novel published in 1903 called THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS by Childers. The 1903 book is full of charts, details of sailing techniques, has no mention of a space for a WC, and has a great trek by compass in the fog (Titty in SWALLOWDALE?).

By the way, my boat out in the driveway is named "Coot".

Jim Reeds, New Providence, NJ (May, 1997)

(This resume is excerpted from a letter Jim originally wrote for inclusion in Signalling to Mars, the electronic newsletter)

My wife Karen has been an AR fan for 40 years, and I ever since our marriage about 25 years ago. Of course our two children had the canon read to them, and for a while identified with Nancy and Titty. Karen (in her Native or Eskimo life) is an historian of science (specializing in medieval and renaissance botany) and I am a mathematician working for a telephone company.

About twelve years ago we went to the Lake District for the first time, simply because we had been reading the books aloud to our six-year-old. The kids have not been back but the grown ups have been back several times. We rode on the steamer on Coniston Water (highly recommended), visited AR's grave, visited High Topps, discovered Mary Swainson's grave in Coniston churchyard, climbed Kanchenjunga, got rained on, got hailed on, got chilled by the wind, almost lost a boot in squishy squelchy mud, and so on. We have not been to the Broads. On the way back from our first visit Karen and the kids were stranded in Gatwick airport for eight hours with baggage. Fortunately Karen had the wits to concoct semaphore flags from drinking straws and paper napkins and had the kids sending messages back and forth across the waiting lounge (consulting Winter Holiday for every letter, we are ashamed to admit).

Here in northern New Jersey the local bus company is "Lakeland Buses." Each time I see one of their buses on the road I think to myself that it would be nice if one of the routes, one of the stops, would take me to THE LAKE, and THE MOUNTAIN, instead of the grimy old Port Authority bus terminal in Manhattan. I've said this out loud often enough for my family to become sick of the joke. But they would hop on quick enough, too, if ever they saw the right bus.

One final tidbit. My mother went to school with a daughter of the Mrs Henry Clay that WDMTGTS is dedicated to. One day her friend (still one of her best friends) invited all her school chums to a boating picnic with AR. My mother hated the idea of boats, so declined the invitation. In such ways does glory slip one by.

S&A Forever! Jim, Karen, Elizabeth and Anne Reeds

Admiral Taylor Rhodes, Beverly Hills, CA (December, 1997)

HOW I BECAME THE ADMIRAL OF THE UNITED STATES BRANCH OF THE SWALLOWS, AMAZONS & D's

For the most part, I grew up in a small town in southeast Kansas in the thirties. Then, there was no television to turn a child's head. In its stead, I read voraciously. One day (I believe it was fairly early in the year of 1938), the librarian of the children's

department of our local library handed me a copy of *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, and said she thought I might enjoy it. That was my introduction to Arthur Ransome and, I confess, that I was deep into the volume before I became interested in the story and its characters. But by the end of the tome, I wanted to read more.

I was the perfect age to be introduced to *Swallows and Amazons*, for I was 9 when the librarian first placed Mr. Ransome's most recent literary effort into my hands. By the summer of 1939, now age 10, I had read all his *Swallows, Amazons & D's* books published to date, and enjoyed them so much that I was moved to write to Mr. Ransome.

Some weeks later, while I was yet a few days from my eleventh birthday, a letter arrived from England; my first letter from another country. That was exciting enough. But you can image my astonishment when I opened the envelope to find one of Mr. Ransome's famous illuminated cards upon which was inscribed my official appointment to Admiral of the United States Branch of the *Swallows, Amazons & D's*, and a drawing of my official flag. That Mr. Ransome took the trouble to do a pen and ink sketch of my admiral's flag on the reverse of the card, I find, attests to his sincere interest in his young readers.

The text of Mr. Ransome's note follows:

Dear Taylor Myers,

Thank you for your very nice letter. I am glad you like the books.

You are hereby officially appointed Admiral of the United States Branch of the S's, A's and D's, with the right to fly the skull & crossbones with one white shot in the top corner of the hoist (see over).

Given under my hand this first day of August, nineteen hundred and thirty-nine.

Arthur Ransome

(You will note AR's salutation is to Taylor Myers. That was my name at the time. My mother remarried approximately two years after, and my new stepfather adopted me, thereby changing my legal name to Taylor Rhodes.)

Last spring, my wife and I visited the Lake Country for the first time, and my fond memories of AR's stories, made manifest by my proximity to many of their settings, prompted me to reflect on why these stories were so important to me. I list three factors that explain Mr. Ransome's significant to me:

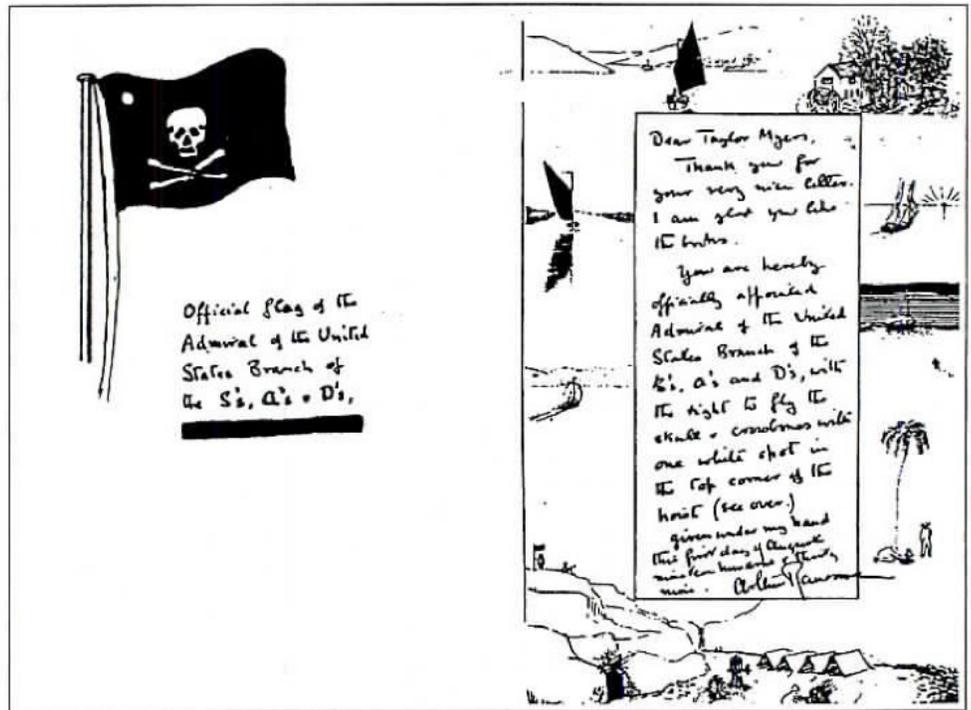
First and foremost, Arthur Ransome was a wonderful storyteller. He never talked down to his readers and, as an additional compensation for me, he provided an introduction to some English customs and phrases.

Second, with the possible exception of *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, nothing fantastic, nor even especially extraordinary happens. Arthur Ransome's stories involve incidents of the magnitude that can and do happen to children everywhere and everyday.

Finally, over the years, I have come realize that the real spirit of the Ransome books is the simple truth that, with a little imagination, you can have a good time wherever you are. That is what John and Susan and Nancy and Titty and the rest did. Certainly, they were fortunate to visit the Lake District, but they used those superb surroundings as a springboard for their fancy, and therein lies the lesson for the day. I have been plopped, both as a child and adult, into some pretty dull situations. When I forgot to use my imagination, I was bored. When I remembered, what happened became memorable, also.

I never wrote another fan letter. To my way of thinking, how could I possibly top this one?

Taylor Rhodes, Adm., U.S.B.



Mark Vladick, Baraboo, WI (Summer, 1997)

My first contact with the Arthur Ransome stories was not through one of the usual early books. I loved reading, but like most ten year olds, my taste left something to be desired, and I mostly read children's mystery stories. After learning about card catalogs and exhausting every , "The Mystery of the ...", I started on a new heading, "The Secret of...". Although I was an imaginative child, Secret Water, with the seriousness of John and the surveying, contrasted with the Eels really being like savages frankly puzzled me. It was an odd introduction to my favorite author. But I liked it enough to remember the author's name, and next year in a different library, I found the American Lippencott editions of Swallows and Amazons, Swallowdale, and Winter Holiday, all with the wonderful illustrations by Helene Carter. The style of both the writing and the illustrations left me with the impression of the characters as being young adults, not children. I was somewhere in between the characters' ages, and when I reread the books, I still feel younger than Nancy! I suspect that all of us Ransome fans, like our Author, retain a youthful enthusiasm, and never quite grow up!

When I read in Hugh Brogan about being drawn into the books and acquiring, "a vision of nature and society which may color their outlook for the rest of their lives", I recognized myself. But the books reinforced something I already had. Even before reading Swallows and Amazons, I had my "lake in the north". One of my earliest memories is being pulled on a sled across a frozen lake to see the site of a cottage my father would build the next year. The lake had an island covered with big pine trees, and a sign saying , "State owned island, camping allowed"! Unfortunately, I had overprotective parents, and never was able to camp there before the cottage was sold about seven years later.

We continued "going up North", a phrase describing the area of northern Wisconsin and Minnesota that is covered with forests and lakes. And later during the Vietnam years and a sort of semi-voluntary military career, I discovered a kind of ultimate "up north" in the southeast. No, not Southeast Asia, but Southeast Alaska! I wasn't being shot at there, but was nearly drowned, electrocuted, and eaten by bears, (though not, of course, all at the same time). It was a wonderful island and fjord world, and I feel that I owe my survival there partly to what I learned from the Ransome books. While in Southeast, I also found an island that was very much like the composite Wildcat Island that until then I thought existed only on maps in the books. And yes, Dave, I will do an article for you and TARSUS about this eventually.

My electronics training in the Coast Guard enabled me to get an instructional technology type of job at one of the two year campuses of the University of Wisconsin. That slowly evolved into audio and video recording, and lately, computer support. I am also interested in the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, (Taliesin is about 45 minutes away), and have been on the board of a couple of Wright restoration groups. I designed a house overlooking a river, somewhat in the Wright style for my late wife Jill and me, and I still live there. Jill and I enjoyed camping up north with a small travel trailer. (She loved the woods and water too, but insisted on her "comforts"). And recently, I purchased a hill top in the woods, surrounded by streams and a swamp, and made it a base of operations to explore the big flowages and chains of lakes in the area.

Both Jill and I had wanted to visit Britain all of our lives. Luckily, someone at the main campus of the UW has an interest in Ransome. Some of his early works are there, as well as the later biography and books about Ransome and even Taqui's books. There was even an older collection in the basement that had many Lake District books including Collingwood's. So, when we finally got to England in 1988, I was prepared. We stayed three days in Rio, and I spent a lot of time driving around to find Rusland plus lots of the locations from the stories. I waded to Blakeholme and bought a rubber raft to paddle across to Peel Island, now one of my favorite places on earth. I didn't find Swallowdale, but I did add a rock to the cairn on Beacon Hill before going down to Trout Tarn. We also visited the Norfolk Broads and stayed at Wroxham. We rented a small enclosed cruiser, since it was raining or drizzling the whole time, but it was fun to see Horning and some of the northern waters. I had left my name at Abbot Hall as being interested in a future Arthur Ransome society, and next year received a letter from Christina Hardyment that enabled me to take part in the Mavis/Amazon restoration. But a variety of difficulties kept me from joining TARS at its inception, so I am glad that I found it on the Internet last summer!

About the same time as finding TARS, I found a special boat that I bought last fall. It is a 22' C-Dory, an enclosed boat with a rounded cabin top and front visor that reminds me of the fishing boats I saw in Southeast. It is a sea going boat, but its dory hull also has a shallow draft so I can use it on the smaller lakes up north as well as on Lake Superior. This summer I plan to spend time on a big wilderness flowage, as well as plan later trips to the Apostle Islands and to Isle Royale too. No it is not a sailboat, so instead of being a sort of Captain Flint, I'll identify with those helpful young men of the Cachalot and Bonnka who showed that people in cruisers can be nice too. And if we in TARSUS can ever get events going in the US, I'd love to use my C-Dory as a support boat for some kind of camping/exploring event in this part of the country. Now all I need is a Nancy or Peggy to share it with!

In the last few years, I have gotten involved with technical support for a musical group that plays folk and original music at Rendezvous gatherings and reenactments. I learned more about traditional camping, and have some beautiful wood candle lanterns and a wrought iron grill with uprights and hooks for cooking over a campfire. And by the way, getting involved with TARS has been such an inspiration that I put my new equipment to good use at the end of summer. I went back to that lake in the north from my childhood and camped on the island! The experience was every bit as wonderful as I expected it to be.

Amy, Tom, and Andy Roy (Fall, 1998)

During the summer of 1996, when Andy was five years old, we had the great good luck to meet a retired Canadian school teacher who used to read the Swallows and Amazons series to her classes. At the time, we both had small sail boats at Fern Ridge, a lake

about 30 miles south of our home here in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, and our new friend graciously described the books to us and encouraged us to look for them at the Corvallis library.

Over the next year, as we read the series aloud to Andy, the whole family became so enchanted by the Ransome spell that when we got the chance to fly to the UK to visit Amy's brother and his family (living in Aberdeen at the time), we made sure to include a week on the Broads in a hired boat, plus a few days in the Lake District on the way up to Scotland.

So October 1997 found us on the Bure, the Ant, and the Thurne enjoying the most fun vacation that any of us can remember -- even the weather was perfect. At the Broads Museum in Potter Higham, we stumbled across some TARS information. We joined up as soon as we got home, and what a lot of fun we have had reading all the great publications that we have received this year.

We have since sold our small sailboat, and we now have a medium-sized one which we keep at Pleasant Harbor, on the Hood Canal, Olympic Peninsula, in Washington. If any TARS are planning to be in that area, please let us know and perhaps we can arrange to meet and go for a sail.

Amy's brother and family are now in Paris, but if we get the chance to go visit again someday, by unanimous vote we are stopping for another week on the Broads!

Roger and June Sykes (Winter, 1998)

It is truly awesome -- all these folks worldwide caught up in the Swallows and Amazons mystique. Until I found out, just recently, about TARS I never imagined there were so many people as wrapped up in the stories of these children as I have been all my life. And mostly University educated Professors, Librarians, all seemingly quite well off (even one Doctor who sounds more like an "anti" than a "devotee") but, as the name of the Society implies, everyone seems more interested in the life and times of the author than the children and their many adventures. Granted, without his tremendous talent, the stories would not have captivated so many so completely. I always believed that Uncle Jim was the author's way of writing himself into the stories.

My two brothers and I were pre-teen, living in Southwestern Canada through our great depression. A third brother being much older was thought of as a grown up and never included in our shenanigans. We were poor but didn't seem to know it (well, it didn't bother us or slow us down much). We lived in a very basic house a mile up the hill from a small town on the big, muddy Fraser river (definitely not for sail boating).

Our overly stern father was mostly away in the military, and our mum - a religious, sensible, easygoing person (thus able to cope with her wild boys) would never let us think we were anything but pretty well off. She would pick up the Swallows and Amazons books at the library and read them to us over and over -- we could never get enough of Swallowdale, Wild Cat Island, Peter Duck's Cave, the Dog's Home, etc.

Where we lived there were few other houses -- hills and fields and woods went on forever and these we roamed and had adventures without end, much as the Swallows, Amazons, D's and Coot Club. Occasionally we would build a raft and pole it down the slough or around one of the small ponds. We were great fort builders -- many, many tree forts, the higher the better -- underground forts (with leaky roofs like the igloo) -- forts in the hayloft of our grandfather's barn -- and snaking through the bracken to "lurk" when a native was spotted. We made bows and arrows, slingshots, tin-can-string phones -- and codes -- boy did we make up codes. We would dam up one little creek or another to make a little swimming hole.

Like Dick, I have always had a keen interest in birds and wildlife, and as a boy would often follow a new or unfamiliar bird for great distances until it had been identified exactly or it had flown too far out of sight.

I had no desire (or the wherewithal) for a University Education -- Art School and a career in commercial art was my dream. Even this was sidetracked when I got into Sign Painting and Graphic Arts, which I have now practiced and enjoyed for more than forty-five years and, although I never got rich in the trade, my wife June, our children Patti and Brian, and I have lived very comfortably, lacking for nothing. June and I were married shortly after high school -- about the time I was starting my Sign Painting career. We acquired our set of Swallows and Amazons books soon after and June became as much of a fanatic as I, reading them over and over.

In 1962 we emigrated to Washington State in the U.S.A. where we bought a home and raised our family. We have managed to find videos of "Swallows & Amazons," "Coot Club," and "The Big Six." We think these are exceptionally well done and wish there were videos available of all the stories.

...As newcomers to the Society we are still confused, but slowly catching on to the many different places -- Bowness-on-Windermere/Rio, Peel Island, Coniston Water/Wild Cat Island and so on. Plus the searches for Swallowdale, Peter Duck's Cave, Slater Bob's and more. In our blissful ignorance we always supposed these places, as well as Holly Howe, Beckfoot, Swainson's, etc., were all on Windermere (which we early on presumed was THE Lake where Houseboat Bay, Shark Bay, Horseshoe Cove, etc. were located and many of the Adventures took place. But of course, being fiction, the author could lump together all his favorite places into one spot and thus enhance the magic?

Can't wait for the next package of goodies. Swallows, Amazons and Coots forever - Roger and June Sykes

Peter, Beth, Salim, Keziah, Polly and Barnabas Furth, January 1999

We are a homeschooled family from Milton, Massachusetts, near the city of Boston. Peter is a professor of Civil Engineering at Northeastern University; Beth teaches the children, Barnabas (6), Polly (10), Keziah (13), and Salim (16), at home. Our general interests include reading as a family, acting, swimming, sailing, skiing, hiking, and "dromedary" riding.

When I, Salim, was 6 or so, my mother purchased our first Swallows & Amazons books from a homeschooling catalog. She was immediately enthralled, and soon began reading the books out loud to me. Among the many influences that shaped our identities growing up were Ransome's books, which we lived out in our daily lives. When my mother read the books out loud to us for the second time through (7 years ago) she began substituting our names in - John became Salim, Susan Keziah, Roger Barnabas, though Titty's becoming Polly caused some confusion when the parrot was present. However, when we played Swallows and Amazons in the woods, or sailed on the pond, Ransome's characters' original names substituted for ours.

Several years ago we discovered our own little "lake in the North" right in the nearby Blue Hills. We stay often in cabins on the lakeside and have gone to sea in a variety of borrowed craft - kayaks, canoes, a Sunfish, and two different sailing dinghies. Starting with the local map that an ancient explorer left burned into the oaken table in our first cabin I followed John's example of charting trails, curiosities and even prevailing winds (always shoreward) onto my own map which is still in progress after years of hiking. The underwater rock chain make the pond a treacherous place to sail; once we found and tried to buoy a pass through the rocks. Places on our map are often reminiscent of the Swallows' locales; Cormorant Rock was named before we ever saw a cormorant there!

Last year we all spent a year in Holland for my father's sabbatical leave. To facilitate visiting Ransome sites we joined TARS and read Christina Hardyment's and Roger Wardale's excellent books about the Lakes. In May of 1998 we ferried across to England and spent two weeks discovering the hidden treasures of the Lakes. Largely following Wardale's guide we unearthed the Dog's Home, the houseboat, a few museums, Wild Cat Island, Rio, Kanchenjunga, fog, Slater Bob's mines, cragfast sheep, stone walls, "Beckfoot", "Dixon's", High Greenland, squashed fly buns, and a very convincing Swallowdale. I found that the little valley was, as Titty said, utterly invisible from outside, and paid for the knowledge by tramping through bracken for 15 minutes trying to get back! While in Holland we of course visited Flushing and found the oldest of the port's four harbors. Ransome's "forest of masts" is now thinned to a scattering in the small, almost landlocked harbor. It is now called the "Vissers Haven" (Fisherman's Harbor) or the "Engelse Haven" (the English (!!!) Harbor). Every nuance and detail is as Ransome described: the green slimy, white-capped piles, the ladder-like fence near the entrance, the pilot boats, the characteristic Dutch town.

I was absent when the family visited southern England and Norway in July, 1998, where they saw the genuine Fram in its Oslo museum. In England they visited the Broads, and my sisters attended Coot Camp at the Horstead Center there. Sailing was the main subject of the camp, and they were taught the art not far from where Dick and Dot first learned. Again, Ransome's description was completely accurate. Needless to say, every moment spent in Ransome's world was worthwhile and instructive. Though it can be disillusioning to have your own mental bubble popped by reality, reality in the Lakes was pretty good itself! Having now returned to the USA, we are glad to be members of TARSUS, and hope to connect with other members.

Salim Furth

Salim has described very well our family's romance with the world of Arthur Ransome. I just want to add a personal note as the mother of four children whose development owes a large debt to Mr. Ransome and the characters and adventures he brought to life for us.

When other children their ages were playing computer games, my kids were snaking through fields, whispering "Lurk!" When others were abandoning their siblings in preference of big kid cliques, mine were cheering each other in the water, "Go it, Titty!" There were many occasions over the past ten years when we would agree to cast schoolbooks aside in order to see "what happens next" in whichever S&A book we were at that time reading as a family.

Our visits to the Lakes, the Broads and to the Fram were not so much to see the real thing or to discover the actual settings of the S&A stories as to say "THANK YOU!" to Arthur Ransome. Those trips were a pilgrimage for me, an acknowledgement of the significance of one man and eleven books in my children's lives. I will always be aware that my children are who they are at least in part because of Arthur Ransome -- and for that I am forever grateful.

Swallows & Amazons For Ever!

Beth Furth

Edwin Kiser (Winter 1998)

(Note: this entry is excerpted from his detailed answer to the "Distilled Enthusiasms II" questionnaire)

I was quite ill, but was making recovery from a rather tricky bout of pneumonia in the late Winter of '42. My mother brought home from the public library a copy of Swallows and Amazons for me to read while I was getting well. She said the reason she selected this particular book was that she noticed there was a map inside the front cover, and thought that would make it easier for me to follow the story. She had never heard of Arthur Ransome, and was not at all familiar with this series of books. I am forever grateful that she just happened to make that particular selection...

It took many years of searching in book stores (to acquire the whole sequence). The very last one I finally obtained was just this last year. That was Great Northern? I asked AMAZON.COM on the Internet to search for this out of print book, and when they found it, that completed the set. Imagine my delight in discovering, this many years later, ANOTHER Ransome book that I had not read! The set is now complete.

I find it rather sad that here in the USA, the Arthur Ransome series is not all that well known. It is so very rare to find anyone that has even heard of any of these books. When I meet someone with young children, it is a very common thing for me to bring up this topic and to recommend that he get Swallows and Amazons from the library for his children.

The thing that got my interest started from the very beginning, and I am so glad this is true for ALL those books, is the presence of the MAP at the front of each and every book of the series. I was but seven when I started, and from this series developed an interest in all kinds of maps. I credit Ransome for starting this interest for me. Maps were very much a part of our daily lives, as I was growing up during the WWII years, with the newspaper having daily on the front page a map showing where the battles were taking place. I learned a lot of geography just from looking at the morning paper, but it was Ransome that got me started looking for maps. Even when going on a trip in the car as a child with my family, I was the one wanting the road map spread on my lap, calling out the towns as we came to them, identifying the road numbers as we went on the way. Ransome taught me to appreciate a map, and I still do to this day.

It was amazing to look back on it, to realize how much I feel I have learned from reading his books. Certainly signaling with two flags was very important to them, so it became important as a child to learn how to do it and to teach it to the kids in the neighborhood. My best friend's father was in the Navy in WWII., and my friend learned the two flag semaphore code from me. And when his father came home, that really impressed him that his son had that signaling ability. The flags semaphore was important in several of those books, with a page of stick figures to explain the alphabet. I have wondered though, why there was never a page of alphabet codes for the dots and dashes, even though the characters could use the Morse code and used it on several occasions. These stories did however make me want to learn that too, but I had to dig that up from some other source material.

When I first bought my sailboat, a 4 meter catamaran with mainsail and jib, I rigged it and sailed it that first day having had NO INSTRUCTION whatever except for what I had learned from reading these stories. I felt confident that I knew what I was doing. It was as if I were hearing Nancy say, "Fingers, Fingers!" so stopped gripping the tiller but handled it gently. Even coming about smoothly I learned to do, remembering their instructions in the books, to avoid jamming the tiller over suddenly as that just stops the boat. The kind of boat I had meant it had a pair of rudders, so there were two sets of pintles to be properly placed into the gudgeons. So nice to impress my wife with such techy talk while shipping the rudders. I knew about watching the flag at the peak of the mast to judge the wind direction, to keep the flag and the sail on the same side to avoid a jibe.

It was quite a delight to discover that Knight's Sailing was available on the Internet. I downloaded and printed off that reference work that John and Dick had so diligently studied. But that reference book was not available when I first started sailing, as that process was learned just from reading Ransome's stories. I got along fine with that sailboat, and loved every minute of it. Such a delight to go "messing about in boats."

Now at age 63, I am not too old to occasionally take down one of those precious volumes and slip back into my childhood and go sailing again with my playmates of those years. It was as if those Ransome characters were my personal friends. I knew them well and loved them all as they were dear to my heart then -- and continue to be so to this day.

These books make me feel I have been to those places. Being in the USA, I have never been to either the Lake District or to the Broads in England, but I feel I know what it looks like. When I see pictures of the real places as provided by the Internet Arthur Ransome Society pages, what I see is quite as I expected it to be, just like the images that have been in my mind just from the word descriptions of Ransome. He was able to describe the environment without making you feel he is describing it which in some authors is a boring tedious hunk of verbiage.

People who think they might become authors should first read Ransome and learn from the Master.

It has been a distinct pleasure and indeed a privilege to have read his stories. I am thankful Ransome made them for so many to love.

Edwin M. Kiser.

David Edwards (Spring 1999)

I joined TARSUS in the Fall of 1994 and, at the time, being firmly resolved to contribute to the Society's stock of member resumes without delay, over four years later I'm finally getting around to it. I learned about TARSUS as, no doubt, others have done, through Robert Barkus's letter in the National Geographic issue of December 1994 and have been enjoying the association of other Ransomeites ever since.

Swallows and Amazons came into our household in 1934 - the Lippincott publication - and was followed on Christmases and birthdays by Swallowdale, Winter Holiday, Peter Duck, and all the rest. My older brother and I did much of our early reading in AR -indeed I seem to have jumped directly from having A.A. Milne and Stevenson's Child's Garden of Verses read to me to reading Ransome on my own at the age of five. Or perhaps it was six; anyhow I can't recall reading any other children's books en route. Naturally I identified wholeheartedly with Roger, so much so that for a misbegotten year or two[declined to answer any of my mother's summonses unless she recollected herself and addressed me as Roger. As time went on I outgrew Roger and formed special relationships with certain of AR's children - Titty, of course (who wouldn't?), Nancy Blackett, who after all these years still overawes me, Dick Callum, whose absent mincledness seems somehow all right now as I enter my seventieth year. Maturing, I found Captain Flint more and more to my liking. Other grown up characters also come to mind - Jim Brading, Squashy Hat and regrettably, the GA!

Like many other Ransome readers, I learned some geography from my early readings and was actually quite disappointed to discover in my teens (much later to be confirmed in Christina Hardyment's book) that The Lake and its environs were semi-fictitious creations. But the Norfolk Broads, Lowestoft, the River Stour and Pin Mill, the Naze, are all true to life and are firmly fixed in my

store of geographical knowledge.

More important was what Arthur Ransome taught me about sailing. In a word everything. As children, my brother and I had to be content with a canoe and an odd little sloop rigged contraption that I believe our father bought through Montgomery Ward. There was no real sailing in my life until my thirteenth year when I attended a summer camp near Chestertown on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. We sailed St. Michael's Scows, Hampton one-designs and, on one thrilling occasion a Chesapeake Bay log canoe. Years later a family friend got me a ride aboard a New York 30 and my college roommate had me out on an Atlantic class sloop. It wasn't until after marriage and well into my career that I (rather, my wife and I) had a boat of our own, a little Interclub frostbite dinghy, which was followed in subsequent years by a succession of larger boats to accommodate our growing family. For fourteen years we cruised the New England coast aboard our 36 foot Little Harbor yawl Evensong. Thank you, AR, for all your wisdom about wind, weather, helmsmanship, sail trim, navigation and simple good sense about sailing.

I have read with interest and a bit of envy about all those TARSUS members who have made extended AR pilgrimages. Many years ago we spent a day aboard a rented half-decker out of Wroxharn but that was the extent of our opportunity during a very limited stay in England. Maybe next year. Meantime, I'm thoroughly engaged with two friends building a power launch that might well fit comfortably into any of AR's tales, a very traditional, long, slender plank-onframe design. We work at a relaxed pace, so with luck she may be commissioned by the millenium.

As to my present reading tastes, they're eclectic though I do like to immerse myself in familiar stories of adventure - Scott, Stevenson, John Buchan - but I also return at least once a year to some of my favorites in the Ransome canon. Naturally, the current TARS Despatches (Spring 1999) made me reach for Misse Lee with a renewed appetite for AR's most exotic adventure tale.

Steve McRobert (Winter, 1999)

I am not sure when I started reading the Ransome books, but I do remember getting to the end of Swallowdale and finding that, much to my annoyance the last page was missing from the copy of "pidgeon post" that I had borrowed from the library of Andover (Andover in OLD Hampshire, England that is) grammar school!

I was not much of a Ransome enthusiast for a few years after that, even though we had moved to Cantley on the river yare in Norfolk. On Saturdays I earned a little money scrubbing the hulls of the hullabaloo's motor cruisers in Brundall, and the boat yard where I did the scrubbing was old-fashioned enough to provide lug sail dinghies as tenders. Once the work was done the boat yard allowed us to borrow these dinghies if they were not being used. This allowed me to take my first tentative steps into sailing, with sails not very different from Swallow's or Amazon's. After that I did a fair amount of sailing in more modern dinghies.

The rebirth of my enthusiasm for AR actually started at Wroxham station (where Tom and the Ds got off the train in "Coot Club") when I bought an old Jonathan Cape edition of one of the books in a secondhand book sale. I decided then to try and acquire a complete set of 12 of these early editions (the only one that I do not have a nicely old copy of is "Misse Lee"). A friend of mine then gave me a copy of Christina Hardyment's wonderful book and I have been hunting down everything by AR and about him and his boats ever since, even though I have been living in the San Francisco Bay area for the last nine years.

I am afraid to say that I have never really visited the Lakes. One weekend I drove through cartmel and along the shore of one of the Lakes in the course of helping a friend get his boat into the water near Barrow Island. I have been to the butt and oyster, but not to the "secret water".

My best effort so far to re-live one of the books was to rent a 27 foot yacht (mine was called narcissus) from Horning for a week on the Broads in 1994. My plan was to recreate the journey of the Teasel in "coot club". I did almost make it (I did not get down to Beccles or Oulton broad), though I found it to be very difficult sailing indeed, with gusty winds, confined spaces, currents up to 5kt and the frequent need to lower the mast to go under bridges. My big advantage over the Teasel (and Racundra) was that I had a diesel engine that worked. Only one cylinder, but 100 percent reliable.

This was just as well when I nearly took the mast off by misjudging the current coming down towards a closed bridge. If the engine had not started immediately we would have been swept under the bridge. Very poor seamanship on my part. I fear that if Ransome had seen it he would have labeled me a "tripper". This really made me think how much more difficult sailing was in Ransome's day. Do you remember the part in S&A, during the race, when someone says how difficult it is to go to windward in a calm? In modern boats which point well you go fastest by going to windward in light winds because of the greater apparent wind. I blanch at the idea of being in the position that John is in after passing the beach end bouy in "wdmtgts". No radar, no (workable) engine, no echo sounder, no flares, no (workable) navigation lights, no radio, no visibility, no dinghy, no main anchor and no electronic Nav aids! No life jackets either, but that is the same in all of the books.

One ironic thing is that the "big radio mast at Bawdsey" referred to towards the end of that book was in fact part of the British experimental radar system. Ransome knew it was there (it was rather hard to miss) but did not know its purpose. That was one of the most closely guarded secrets in England at the time

The last part of my "Ransome resume" so far is that I finally (belatedly) joined TARSUS. I would like to get together with other tars members in the San Francisco Bay area. I quite often rent sailboats from Cass's Marina in Sausalito and I cannot think of a more appropriate way to meet other Ransome enthusiasts than going sailing.

Sandra Garber and Jim Satterfield (Winter 1999)

How did it begin??? Perhaps when Sandra was sailing long ago with Adele at the helm, she may have mentioned "Swallows and Amazons" to Sandra. Or perhaps it came from our exploring Britain with a copy of Joan Bodger's "How the Heather Looks" in hand. Regardless, we discovered Arthur Ransome's wonderful series of books.

About the same time, I was reflecting on our canoe. It wasn't being used much. I had seen a canoe being sailed about 40 years earlier on Cayuga Lake in New York. Perhaps the sailing canoe image burned into my brain. I went to the internet where I discovered the world of canoe sailing, got in contact with the American Canoeing Association, purchased their ACA standard class lateen sail, built a sail rig, and got ready to sail. But Sandra was of the opinion that some classroom/water instruction would be highly desirable before this old fool killed himself or injured others.

We enrolled in a basic sailing course, got on the water in a sloop-rigged boat, and then I felt secure enough to take the canoe out for a trial run. Oh, I flipped the canoe on the first day, and have flipped it since. But I enjoyed the many expeditions I made last year in the good ship(canoe) "Tarka".

Sandra hasn't had much time to participate since she is continuing to pursue a wonderful career. I am retired, so I have time to piddle. Together we are building an 8' dingy/pram (THE OTTER) which Sandra will row...and aid me in getting back if I am becalmed. I also plan to build a 12' "Semi-Dory" (the A. RANSOME) which will have a sprit sail. These boats will all fly TARS burgees.

We have enjoyed all of Ransome's books, and continue to delight in the adventures of the characters as well as marveling at the accurate descriptions of sailing. I plan to have an annual TARSUS event on Lake Allatoona each year for our grandchildren and others who wish to come.

Jim Satterfield

Bill & Jane Jobe (Spring, 2000)

We have been members for a couple of years, but have never sat down to write a resume. I, Jane, read my first Ransome book in about 1939. It was Winter Holiday. Growing up in San Mateo, California, I was close to the water, but my family were not particularly interested in boats or sailing, so I enjoyed those pleasures vicariously through Mr. Ransome. I eventually read all the books. I think my favorite for a long time was Coot Club. It was not until many years later when I was a real sailor myself that I really appreciated We Didn't Mean to Go To Sea, despite its rather contrived ending.

I went to the University of Washington for four years, getting even closing to great sailing and cruising waters. At that time I went so far as to answer an ad in the paper for a small wooden sailboat, looked at it, but then a reality check told me that I had no place to keep the boat, and didn't know how to sail anyway.

Time passed. Early in my first marriage I was in England, and persuaded my husband that I couldn't leave without spending a few days on the Norfolk Broads. It was really exciting for me to have tea on Horning Staithe, and watch a small sailboat race in progress. Port and Starboard were much in my mind. Later on that same trip, we were in the Lake Country. I had no idea which lake Ransome used as his inspiration for the S&A series, but enjoyed the views of all of them.

As my children learned to read, they went all through my Ransome books, and liked them as much as I had. I was divorced at about age 40, and decided it was then or never, and bought myself a 40th birthday present, a Klepper Master, which had a 12 ft mast and leeboards. Friends taught me and the kids to sail, and the boat was used on Sierra Nevada lakes, and some San Francisco Bay waters.

I married Bill a couple of years later, had him read the AR books, and he immediately took to sailing. We sailed the Klepper on Tornaes Bay, Lake Washington, Sequim Bay, and the Sierra Lakes, Caples, Silver, and Kirkwood on Carson Pass.

Before long we got a new boat--a 19' Flying Scot. With it we ventured onto San Francisco Bay, Monterey Bay, Lake Tahoe, and more of the inland waters of Puget Sound. While it lasted in San Francisco, we were members of The Dinghy Cruising Association, and did several weekend outings with them. (Drascombe Luggers were the boat of choice.)

The big leap was in 1984 when we bought a quarter partnership in a Catalina 30 and learned big boat sailing. We sailed up and down San Francisco Bay, and up into the Delta.

Three years later, the dream came true, and we bought our own Santana 37 sloop. Now retired from high school teaching, we sailed to Mexico and spent two winters cruising the west coast and the Sea of Cortez, and four long summers in Puget Sound and British Columbia. Farthest north in British Columbia was Mackenzie Sound. At the end of one of those summers, we sailed back down the coast to San Francisco Bay.

The Ransome books were never far from our minds, and we would have called the Santana the "Arthur Ransome" except that we had bought it from friends and kept their name. While anchored in the Octopus Islands, B.C., for a few days, just at dusk we saw several wooden dinghys full of 8 to 12 year olds circulating among the nearby islets, climbing stealthily through the trees, and generally having a wonderful time. The S&As and Ds would have loved the islands of the B.C. Inland Passage.

More time passed, and we regretfully sold the big boat a couple of years ago, but still have the Klepper and the Flying Scot, and still sail in and near the Sierra Nevada mountains. And none of this would have happened if it hadn't been for AR.

Jane Jobe

Robert Boardman, (Fall 2000)

My older brother, John, received all of the Swallows and Amazons books pretty much as they became available on the American market, roughly from 1930 through 1947. In due course they were passed along to me, and of course I enjoyed them immensely and still own and read them on occasion. We owned a small, flat bottomed, centerboard sailboat which of course was named "Swallow" and she proudly flew a swallow pennant which my mother had made for her. My brother was very much the skipper, emulating in some respects John Walker, though on occasion he seemed more like Captain Flint at his most native. We had no sisters, and I was not at the time very keen to assume the role of Roger to my elder brother, but at least the initial is correct.

In 1949, my mother took me on a trip to her native England, and among other places, we visited Windermere. I had spent a good deal of time in advance, reading again descriptions of the lake and Wild Cat Island and various other places, and carefully tracing all the maps of the lake I could find in the books. Some cousins owned a small outboard motor boat on the lake in which we sailed to an island which at least was in roughly the right location and had a bit of the right topography, so as a 15 year old boy I was quite happy to think that I was indeed walking the shores of Wild Cat Island. Of course I have since read of another original of the island on Coniston Water, but that does not diminish my childish pleasure and sense of adventure and discovery.

The books taught me a great deal about sailing which was useful to me in later years when I sailed my own 27 foot sloop on many happy cruises. I had absorbed a good deal of the sense of self-sufficiency and self-reliance which came out so well in the stories, and in particular I tried hard never to be a duffer. I did, however, draw the line at believing that even large steamers should give right of way to small sail boats, especially at night, as suggested in "We Didn't Mean to go to Sea."

Thank you again for refreshing past, pleasant memories, and I look forward to the regular publications in due course. Please feel free to use any of the foregoing as you might wish if you think it might be of interest to others.

Karabandangbaraka,
Robert O. Boardman

Tom Napier, (Winter 2000)

A pre-boomer, I grew up in Scotland in the austere years immediately after World War II. My introduction to the Ransome books came when an aunt gave me *The Picts and the Martyrs* when I was about ten. It took me a while to get around to reading it since I thought it was a history book. Once started, I discovered the friends and adventures I didn't have in the real world. I was about twelve before my parents could afford to buy me a second-hand bicycle (sorry, dromedary) much less a boat.

My father was a minister, which meant straitened circumstances but ample vacation time. The family often camped for weeks in the depths of the country. We always had a latrine tent off in the bushes and I too was puzzled by the absence of such facilities in Swallowdale. I was filled with admiration for children who could spend all day float without a pit stop.

Being interested in science, I identified with Dick and, since our family had an archetypical great-aunt living with us year-round, I had great sympathy for Nancy and Peggy. Eventually I found the other books in the library and got to know the Swallows too.

Then came a long gap. I graduated in physics and worked for a while at Leeds University. I spent a weekend near Lake Coniston in 19657 without, as far as I can remember, ever thinking of Arthur Ransome. After three years in Holland working in the European space program I moved to CERN in Switzerland where I learned to sail on Lake Geneva. Off one of the Greek islands I discovered two things about dinghys. One, if they have severe lee helm they can start to go about, then suddenly flip back and capsize. Two, in shallow water the tip of the mast can stick in the sandy bottom and you can't right them again. Luckily the shore wasn't far.

Since 1981 I've been living in the U.S. where I have both married and divorced, showing just how acclimated I have become to American ways. Semi-retired since 1996 (Thank, you, stock market.) I still do some electronics consulting. I am becoming known for my articles in electronics hobby magazines. My pet unpaid activity is pointing out the flaws in pseudoscientific theories (see, for example, www.phact.org) so it pained me to see Ransome giving credence to dowsing in Pigeon Post.

Since I discovered the Godine reprints in 1999 I've been reading and rereading the books I knew as a child. I haven't got a full set yet but I'm working on it. I found TARS through buying some Red Fox reprints on a recent visit to Britain.

Tom Napier

Susan Bruce, (January 2001)

In 1992, my husband and I took a brief work-related trip to England, leaving our two young children behind. Every evening, the eight-year-old daughter of friends we were visiting would retreat from adult conversation into the private world of Swallows and Amazons. I had never encountered Ransome before, but in keeping with our theory that one can never have too many books, we set out immediately to acquire a few titles, just in case they were not available in the US. I was certain that our two would eventually turn into just that sort of child, never without a book to read and re-read. I was only partly right, because although they read around the clock, the Ransome series turned into special books that we could only read aloud together, curled up on Emily's bed one night and Stephen's the next, with an ever larger assortment of special pillows and blankets, stuffed animals and dolls. (Alas, my husband, who has exceptionally good taste in literature, took to washing the dishes every evening at about this time. So he missed out on Ransome entirely, and still doesn't catch the occasional literary reference.)

You can detect some nostalgia in this account, because our kids are now 14 and 15 years old, a bit beyond reading together at bedtime. But in between then and now we have had some Ransome adventures. In 1996-97, we carried several books with us to China, where we lived for three months in two small rooms in Beijing, and then on to Australia where we spent four months on sabbatical. Ransome was a great cure for homesickness. It was in Australia that we noticed mention of TARSUS in the back of one of the books

and made our first contact via email. Since the parents had planned this long year away from home and familiar places, we gave the kids the option of choosing a country to visit in Europe en route back to the US. Stephen planned two weeks in Italy, Emily chose England and Wales.

Thus, one rainy evening in May 1997 found us driving through the Norfolk Broads, looking for a houseboat to rent for two nights. Emily was quite certain we would find one, with a dinghy attached, and that there would be a coots nest to discover the next morning. To our great astonishment, we did and there was. What's more, when we explained to the boatyard owner why we were in the Broads that wet evening---that it was a Ransome odyssey---he quietly took us to a shed, pointed to a small black boat, and said, "You know what that is, don't you? That's the Death and Glory." It was the boat used in the BBC series, which was filmed nearby.

This experience gave us great confidence a few days later, as we were hiking in the Lake District, that we could indeed find Swallowdale, the Igloo, and Wildcat Island. It was too cold to sail in early May, but otherwise it was a wonderful time to explore the region. If you plan a trip---and I would heartily suggest you do---be sure to get a copy of *In the Footsteps of the Swallows and Amazons*, by Claire Kendall-Price. On one of the walks mentioned in the book, you may come across the hut we built out of stones and driftwood. If so, you'll find that we left you a map there that will lead you straight to the Igloo .

Susan Bruce
Urbana, Illinois

Eric Abraham (Summer, 2001)

You asked for new members to please submit a resume. I don't think you want my full 5 page professional resume. I will, however, say here that professionally I am a ceramic artist, and have been for the past 40 years. You may have seen me sometime last year on the Lynette Jennings Design show on the Discovery Channel. I do porcelain sculpture in the style of the Baroque and Rococo period. Some call it "Neo-Rococo" or even "Okie-Barokie"!

(If you are interested, you can see my work on the web at www.strecker-nelsongallery.com and www.jaynegallery.com)

When I was eleven years old, I had just moved to Enid, Oklahoma and had not made any new friends at that time; but in the school library I discovered a whole new set of friends - the Swallows and Amazons. I proceeded to read all the books. I think between the school and the local Carnegie Public Library they had all 12 books. In the summer of 1949, my father broke his leg and every day after visiting him in the hospital I would go to the lake in the city park next door and rent a row boat from an elderly nautical looking man that I pretended was Peter Duck. Since I was a regular, and there weren't very many boat rowers, he would let me stay for much longer than my paid-for 30 minutes! In my mind I was re-enacting the adventures of the Swallows and Amazons on tiny little lake about 100 by 300 feet!

This has been my main experience with a physical boat, other than the evening I was taken out on Lake Michigan from Chicago in a small sail boat a few years ago - I was allowed to steer, and thoroughly enjoyed it. I later did many drawings on my own (I still have many of these, drawn in ink on tracing paper) of the Goblin and other related boats and adventures, even making up my own stories about all my new friends. I started reading all I could find out about England and finally visited there when I was stationed in Germany. I didn't make it up to the Lake District due to time considerations, but thoroughly enjoyed London, Bournemouth and Penzance.

Recently, a friend found a copy of "Swallows and Amazons" in a Boulder, CO bookstore and that started me back on re-reading the entire series. I have purchased all the Godine paperbacks of the series that he has published. I hope that my grandson, aged 4, will find these stories as much fun as I did/do.

I finally found the Arthur Ransome web site and have been reading the entries on TARboard, learning much about the stories, the characters and their environment. It would be great to join the group on one of the camping and sailing activities. I just won a large-ish award in an art show, and have thought that it should be spent on something very special. Maybe a small sailboat? We have a large lake near Manhattan, Kansas.

I keep thinking that these wonderful stories would make a great series of ceramic wall pieces. Check out the two above web sites for some of my work. I have done several "sea mirrors" which are almost directly influenced by the "Swallows and Amazon" books.

As you can see, my experience with boats and sailing is rather short, but my love of the adventure and excitement was certainly stimulated by these books. I look forward to being a member of the Arthur Ransome Society.

Thank you,
Eric Abraham

John Pappas, (Fall, 2001)

It was in San Francisco, about 1954, and I was about ten (10) or eleven (11) years old. I was looking for something good to read in our neighborhood branch library at 23rd Street. I saw an interesting book jacket; it was colorful and looked like a map. It had a really neat border and lots of interesting sites marked on it. There was a beautiful drawing of the sun, and Octopus Lagoon, and Rio, and other wonderful places on the map. Of course, it was Swallows and Amazons, the American edition.

I remember it was hard to understand the first part, with this boy named Roger beating against the wind towards Darien. And the part about duffers and drowning was enticing but hard to understand for this ten year old. However, the more I read, the more I was captured by the sheer feeling of adventure and imagination in the book. I loved it! And I read every book the library had by Arthur Ransome. Many of the adventures had information that was over my head, but I could not get enough. There were a couple of the

books that I never found then, but I never forgot the wonderful worlds of the Lake District or the Broads.

As an adult, I found a couple of used hard cover editions of some of the Ransome books. My wife, Paula, loved to hear me tell her about the Swallows and the Amazons. She had always wanted to sail, and so had I, and so we always had that as a dream for the future. Later, we had two children, a daughter and a son. I ordered copies of all the Ransome books from my bookstore here in Stockton, and each night I read a chapter to the children as bedtime stories. We eventually read all the books that way. They were as entranced as I had been with these wonderful stories.

Around 1985, Paula and I took sailing lessons, we bought a 25 foot McGregor sloop, and we named her Swallow. The day we launched her, a flock of swallows came and flew around our mast top. (The absolute truth!) My mother-in-law, who was a great seamstress, sewed us a burgee with a blue swallow on it, and we were on our way. We learned to sail on the San Joaquin River, which is very similar to the Broads in the Coot Club books. In fact, we always had coots swimming around our mooring at the Stockton Sailing Club!

Some of our greatest adventures were with another couple who were our friends. They lived with their twins on a houseboat on the Calaveras River, just off the San Joaquin River. They had read the Ransome books also, and their twins were about the same age as our son and daughter (11 - 12 years old), so we sailed together. Once, we all sailed to Spud Island for the weekend. We camped, and the four children spent the entire time making a map of this "Secret Water" island (as the characters in the book had done). It was a real thrill to see these children creating their own adventures and having lots of fun.

It is still our dream to visit the Lake District some day. We also hope to meet some of the other members of TARS soon.

SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS FOREVER!

John Pappas

Stockton, California

Maureen Eichner (Winter 2001)

I cannot remember the exact period I was introduced to Swallows and Amazons. I believe that my father read the books when we were living in Maine. I would have been about three. Several years ago however, someone in my family (probably my mother), rediscovered the books. After reading SA I was in love. While I still haven't read all of the books, I am eagerly awaiting the Godine books publications. I'm pretty sure I'm right around Misse Lee. When we (my sister and I) first read the books we immediately decided to reenact them. I chose Nancy, my sister was Peggy, and my little brother was Roger. We took an old hammer and "mined" for gold on some rocks in the back yard. We also mapped our yard, an extensive undertaking, especially in snow. While vacationing in Mystic, Connecticut we discovered a set of hidden paths in the tall reeds at a beach. These we named Swallagonian. We initiated our cousin, who promptly became Titty. Now, however, due in part to native troubles ("So when are you going to play Swallows and Amazons again?"), that segment of SA history is gone. But we all enjoy the movie and have shown it to several friends. One especially enjoys the scene in which Roger wants to know what scurvy is. She sometimes walks up to me out of the blue and says, "' Sailors die from it like flies!'" This can be rather unnerving.

When I'm reading a book it is my favorite. Question: This frequently happens to me with series of books. Am I the only one? However, I especially enjoy Pigeon Post and We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea. During one rereading I was upstairs, my father was downstairs. I made him rather nervous because gales of laughter were issuing from the room. I was probably at the end of WDMtGtS. I love the part when Titty says, "We'll all be hanged at Execution Dock, chains jangling in the wind. Oh I say Jim, do prosecute! Nancy'd be simply delighted!" Titty is actually my favorite, although I try to be faithful to my former character.

Karabadangbaraka

Maureen (Nancy) Eichner

Elly Hendricks (Winter 2001)

I was born (in 1935) and raised in Toledo, Ohio, but spent all my summers in the North, in a cottage in Mackinaw City, Michigan, on the Straits of Mackinac. [I still get up there for some time every year.] I first read Swallows and Amazons and Secret Water, which were my brother's books, and then Swallowdale and Great Northern?, which were gifts to me. Then I found all the other books, except Peter Duck, in the Toledo Public Library. I always thought I wanted to learn to sail but my parents were not encouraging, an opportunity never arose, the Great Lakes are not the English lakes, and my only sailing is in the imagination.

In the fall of 1975 I visited (for 2½ weeks) American friends who were living in London for a semester, and we went to the Lake District for 3 days, staying in Windermere and Keswick. What a revelation it was actually to see fells and becks and tarns, the S&A landscapes come to life! I bought, in paperback, all the books except the four hardcover ones I already mentioned and so, finally read Peter Duck. It was not until after that visit that I learned that specific places in the beloved books could be identified in reality, and I vowed to return.....but the years went by.

In 1994, 1998, and 2000, my friend Nancy (her real name, not an attempt to be ruthless) and I attended the July Beatrix Potter Study Conferences held in Ambleside, each time spending a couple of additional weeks traveling elsewhere in England. In the past 10 years (in no particular order), I have joined TARS, read The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome (a gift from my ever-loving brother), visited Abbot Hall in Kendal, taken Claire Kendall-Price's walk #11 (Head of the Lake and Jenkin Crag, from Ambleside), replaced 2 of my 1975 paperbacks that disappeared, acquired the videos of Coot Club and The Big Six, bought and read more books such as Roger Wardale's In Search of Swallows and Amazons, Christina Hardyment's Arthur Ransome and Capt. Flint's Trunk, and Coots in

the North and other stories by Arthur Ransome.

Highlights in the year 2000: 1) taking the Swallows & Amazons tour on Gondola on Coniston Water and therefore finally seeing (from the boat) Wildcat Island up close (including the secret harbour) also feeling somewhat embarrassed to realize that I, a serious (?) educated American 60+ adult, knew all (or almost all) the answers to the Captain's quiz about this series of English children's books from a couple of generations ago also being happy to note the apparent appeal of those books to children of today! 2) finding (Roger Wardale's) Swallowdale on Blawith Fells a great climb, great view, and great feeling of achievement! 3) visiting Norfolk, first time for many things, mainly just getting a feel for the Broads: climbing the tower (89 steps, 2 ladders) of Ranworth church for the view, taking a cruise out of Wroxham on the River Bure and Wroxham Broads, seeing coots and an old wherry, dining at the Swan Inn in Horning.

I feel very fortunate to have been able to travel in England, to see childhood (and adult) literary scenes become real, and to share such literary enthusiasms with other!

Swallows & Amazons forever!

Elly Hendricks

Bob Herbert (Winter 2001)

Twice, some years ago, Arthur Ransome was a morale-booster for me.

I was nine in 1934 and in the age that knew nothing of penicillin and other wonder drugs, I was unfortunate enough to have mastoid a serious bone infection behind the ear, and in the long hospital time around the operation, and return hospital time for subsequent blood poisoning, my morale was about as low as it could be. A family friend gave me a book she thought might help. With Winter Holiday it was love at first sight and AR became part of the family.

In 1943 I was in Poona, India, doing training with the American Field Service, volunteer field ambulance to be in Assam my first year with the British 14th Army and 8th Army in Italy the year following. I was not homesick though India seemed a good bit from home. I was a high school drop out and remember our nit reached Bombay on a decrepit troopship the same day that my class graduated.

I was browsing a bookstall in Poona and came upon my old friend, Arthur Ransome! I am a fast reader and Swallowdale was familiar so I finished in time to make it back to the barracks. After the war, I told my parents about that wonderful afternoon and they said that A.R. might like to know about it. The result which you see (below) I pasted in Winter Holiday which was where the happy relationship began.

The Herberts are a four generation Arthur Ransome family. My parents appreciatively read the books as they came into my library. My children two boys and two girls built their own libraries. (I would give them new copies but not part with the originals.) And finally, the grandchildren.

We built a 26 foot sloop from a Lugar kit, whose name you can probably guess. One of my sons, Rob, who has professional University degrees in Marine Biology, naturally became a professional boat builder and is in the process of building a sixteen foot cop of the Swallow for me. The plan is Swallow insofar as we and Swallow scholars can make. The one big change is the addition of two feet to her length, added for the fact that the original Swallow had a crew of four plus kids, while this is apt to have an older crew.

By the bye, my original TARS membership came from Rob and his equally marine minded wife Buffy. You can see what wonderful things A.R. has done for our family.

Swallows and Amazons Forever!

Bob Herbert, Pensioner Crew Member #2405

(Bob Herbert wrote to Arthur Ransome in 1948 and received the following reply, which he pasted it in his copy of WH:

"Dear Mr. Herbert, Thank you for a letter that any author might be pleased to receive. I like people to like my books and best of all I like people to find that they have not grown too old to read them. That, almost, makes me feel not too old to go on writing them. So, presuming on our chance meeting in the Indian Bookshop, I shake you warmly by the hand and am, Yours sincerely, Arthur Ransome.")

Terry Kirker (Winter 2002)

When I was 8 I contracted mastoid (like Bob Herbert) and was in hospital for 6 weeks. I was a voracious reader and my parents enrolled me in the Junior Literary Guild which sent me Swallows & Amazons and made me a lifelong Anglophile and Ransome lover. As more of them came my way, I even wrote a review for Young Wings. Helen Ferris, editor of JLG, gave me Ransome's address and I wrote him. As you know, he was a faithful correspondent, and we wrote back and forth for several years. (Yes, I still have all the letters with their illustrations, etc.) I had a small toy sailboat which I sailed in the Boat Pond in Central Park (I was born and raised a pure city child in Manhattan), and which I named...Swallow, of course. I was a serious only child, with glasses, long black braids, and wanted to be a writer. Is it any wonder that when Dorothea later appeared, I was convinced that I had inspired her?

I grew up, married a native San Franciscan and moved to California, where we had a boy and a girl. My husband had always wanted a sailboat, so when the children were 12 and 10 we bought a lovely old sloop. 32' long, solid teak, a John Alden design built in Hong Kong. In spirit she was much like Racundra; sturdy, roomy and not too fast. Son Andy loved sailing the dinghy round Newport Harbor where we had a slip, while we varnished, etc. Our trips were all to Catalina, and every weekend was spent on her until Andy grew up into a motorcycle racer, and we no longer had the time or money to keep her.

In the late 70's I returned to college to finish my degree..Cal State Fullerton. There, in the main library, I found Arthur Ransome's books. NOT the ones he wrote, but the contents of his own library, which had evidently been put up for sale after he died, and the librarian there bought them! They were kept as a special collection.

In May-June of 1989 I took my husband on a trip to England, some of it a pilgrimage to Ransome country. We stayed at Ambleside, rented a car, and visited Abbot Hall where I spent some time with Miss Slowe. We even visited the grave site. When I returned home, I had the CSFullerton library make a copy of all the card entries for the Ransome Collection and sent it to Abbot Hall, so they have a record of them.

After we came home, I was introduced to one of my husband's friends named Mark Ransome. Turned out he's a collateral cousin of some sort and his sister in England has done some genealogical tracing. I wrote him about the book on the TARS Stall list, and he has just left for England (he WAS going anyhow!) and will buy it...the one about the Ransome family.

One more AR note...my eldest grandson Gavin will be 11 on Jan. 18th, Ransome's own birthday! He's already deep into Harry Potter, but I'm trying to make a sailing fan out of him.

Up to date? I've been a widow for 3 yrs; found a great guy on the internet, and we've been together ever since. In May we're going on a cruise from London to London, all around Great Britain, Ireland and Scotland. It would be wonderful if we could make the TARS meeting somehow.

If not, well, I'm so thrilled to be a part of it from here.

Terry Kirker

Whittier, California

Wm. Jerome (Jerry) Crouch, (January 2003)

Unlike most of the other crew members, I came upon Arthur Ransome and the Swallows and Amazons late in life and from a decidedly unnautical background. I have always enjoyed certain kinds of books for children and grew up on *The Wind in the Willows* and thought, with the *Water Rat*, that there was nothing so good as "messaging about in boats," even though I never really had a boat to mess about in. In the course of my work I have been a regular reader of such journals as the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Times Book Review*. I remember reading, several years ago, an article on children's books in some such journal that mentioned the Swallows and Amazons stories. I was interested, partly, I think, because it was a series and not just a single book and because the stories dealt with the out of doors. But it was not until some time later that I actually got a copy of Swallows and Amazons from the library and read it. Even then it was, again, some time before I decided to look for the others. I think that my interest was really aroused by seeing them all listed in the catalogs from "A Common Reader" that I get regularly. I made up a list of the books and did find a copy of *Swallowdale* in our library but had to get copies of all the rest through interlibrary loans since neither our public nor our university library had any of them. I have also gone on to read, also on interlibrary loan, Hugh Brogan's *Life*, Christina Hardymont's *Captain Flint's Trunk*, Roger Wardale's *Nancy Blackett*, and Peter Hunt's introductory study. I have found it fascinating to read about the parallels between the books and the places and people that Ransome knew. Recently my wife presented me with the entire series published by David Godine, and I had already bought of copy of *Coots in the North*. So I now have pretty much the corpus ready at hand.

I think that what appeals to me about the books is the innate decency evinced by the characters (with the exception of a few villains, of course), which to me is refreshing in a world that seems increasingly indecent. I enjoy the great sense of the open air that Ransome creates so well and also the sense of doing things, of common activities that he conveys so tellingly. Readers of the books cannot but help being caught up in them, being as it were an unseen character in the stories, sharing with the other characters their activities, feelings, and experiences. And, finally, there is the locale of the stories (I'll pass over the two exotics here) the Lake country and the Broads that in Ransome's hands becomes, for me at least, a defining element of the books: though I have never seen either of the places, I feel as though I know them.

As for my personal life, I have spent the better part of it in the book business first as a college teacher of English composition, a book traveller, and finally editor for the University Press of Kentucky, from which I retired ten years ago after thirty-one years. Rather than sailing, I fear that I give my time to cycling, which I have been doing now for twenty-five years or so. It seems a more natural thing to do here in central Kentucky where we have a lovely countryside of horse farms and rolling hills traversed by many small roads and lanes but, alas, not many waterways and those with more than their share of Hullabalooos. But in Ransome's books I can feel the wind against my cheek, hear the water chuckle under the stem, and look for the small white sail down the lake.

Jerry Crouch

Lexington, Kentucky

Molly M. McGinnis (Spring, 2004)

To my enduring regret, I didn't read my first Ransome book until I was about 30 years old. I was a "library assistant" in a children's department of the Oakland (CA, USA) public library and one day my boss handed me a discard copy of *Swallows and Amazons* with the prophetic words "You might like this." (We were supposed to know children's literature—a great excuse to read good books!) I was hooked and it's just fortunate that when I got to *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea* my boss was kind enough to

pretend I wasn't there for a while, rather than firing me for taking up space while glued to the pages. It is still the book of all SA books that I don't dare pick up unless I know I won't have to put it down.

I've often wondered what I'd have thought of the books and if they would have changed my life if I'd found them when I was 9 or 10. I know I'd be a much better biologist today if I'd learned to keep a notebook, all the time, every day, the way Dick keeps notebooks. And the way Aldo Leopold, one of the most germinal biologists of the 20th century kept notebooks. (University of Wisconsin at Madison created an entire department, Game Management and Wildlife Ecology, for Leopold; the book most of us know best is *Sand County Almanac*, a collection of essays.)

Like many of the older TARS Ransome lovers, I lived in the country in an age and place (rural Ohio, late 1940's) when children could roam almost as freely as Swallows and Amazons, and I had lots of places to explore but few companions my own age. Too bad I didn't have fantasies from S&A to add to my own – I could have looked for a mine, climbed Pike's Peak, or set up Pictish housekeeping in the old sheep shed.

My husband (Dr. Samuel McGinnis) and I had a few months near Cambridge, England in 1971, where Sam had been invited to do some temperature work with pigs at Babraham, the Cambridge version of UC Davis or Cornell's Ag school. I took *Swallows and Amazons* and *Coot Club* for "location hunts" and dragged a somewhat reluctant husband and rather bewildered 3-year old around and upon Coniston and Windermere (we got a good feel for the Ransome uplands walking the footpaths from Hilltop, Beatrix Potter's home farm, too, and were convinced that a farm we looked down upon from one of the ridges was Dixon's). We had a day on the Broads in a motor launch embarrassingly like *Margoletta*, though it was quiet, and I even learned a little about rowing and steering boats in this "good nursery", just like Dick and Dorothea. (Sam is from a fishing family and a great waterman though not what Nancy Blackett would consider a sailor –no sailing!) We had the thrill of seeing masts above the reeds, masts of boats on far-distant cuts, rivers, or Waters –just the way they were in the books.

At that time I hadn't yet learned to "see" birds (If I'd read the S&A books as a child you can bet I'd have learned how to see with a birders' eye), though I do remember a heron and a few coots and ducks. Now I'm looking forward to a return to the Broads: both the bird populations and my birders' eye are in much better shape now!

We do a lot of birding and boating here in the Central Valley of California – the very best wildlife viewing comes when we wind through the rivers in a canoe or kayak (no room for sail). There are still one or two places here where a landowner keeps a boat for crossing the river, with a cable system for pulling it back and forth for access from either bank, --a very S&A arrangement. Between Sam's field biology courses, my Nature Study courses, and our business as endangered species consultants we have lots of field experiences that would make any Ransome character happy.

The more I write the more I appreciate (and envy) Ransome's writing. Nearly every word drives the plots and characters and place become by their words and actions, not by being discussed and analyzed. Re-reading the S&A books is a good remedy for stodge in the writing and I'm thankful to have found TARS and the TARS shop bookstall to enhance the re-readings. The well and lovingly written, beautifully produced books are full of information. The books about the places in the series have photos from then and now, so carefully chosen that it's even fun to read with an S&A book in one hand and a bookstall book in the other and compare as you go. Not many books of either kind will stand up to this! (Beatrix Potter's books and James Joyce's *Ulysses* are among the few –food for deep thoughts about 20th century literature--)

PS: I too have occasionally wondered where the children went "to the bathroom", especially when there got to be so many of them. After I'd read the many grumpy comments on the subject and begun re-reading the series, I realized that there is virtually no incident in any book that doesn't in some way further the plot –and it is difficult to imagine a Ransome book with a sub-plot depending on latrines! I did wonder, though, after reading the biographies and letters, if Ransome might not just have touched on the subject had his relations with his own insides not been so painful and disturbing for so many years. Maybe. There are no mosquitoes or biting flies or midges either, and I can't believe that there really were none around the lakes, the broads, or the Hebrides in midsummer...

Molly McGinnis
Manteca, California

Les Jenkins (Autumn, 2004)

Way back in the 50's when I was 7 or 8 my Dad took me on first ever holiday, to the Norfolk Broads. My father had always been fond of birds and had passed this love on to me at an early age. We specifically wen to The Broads in search of Bittern, Kites and Avocets, all very rare birds in Britain but ones which could be seen in the Norfolk/Suffolk area. My Dad chartered a motor cruiser and we did all the Coot Club exploration type stuff that you would expect, even though at the time I'd never read an AR book, not had he.

The following year he took me to Scotland, at the time we lived in London and en route to the Highlands we stopped for 2 days in the Lake District. I had a marvelous time there climbing the mountains and wandering the banks of Coniston Water, not knowing that I was treading on holy ground.

During the following 6 years my Father and I would make more trips of exploration. Usually on Dromedaries to the New Forest some 120 miles from where we lived, and during school holidays myself and 2 or 3 friends would spend many happy weeks exploring the South Downs close to where I lived.

At the ripe old age of 15 I came across a copy of SA and fell in love with the Walkers & Blacketts and later the D's. I always

wondered how different it would have been for me if I'd had brothers & sisters to share my explorations with.

I read the first 6 AR books at this time with the exception of *Peter Duck* and then like most 17-18-year-olds my interest turned to girls and cars and Swallows & Amazons were forgotten. Interest was re-awakened however when I had children of my own. Before this happened though I spent time in the Merchant Marine, mostly in the Caribbean but I did make a couple of World Cruises on the QE2 getting the opportunity to explore rain forests, volcanoes and all sorts of wondrous things, and many times I would think about the S&A and wonder if they ever got to do this sort of stuff.

In 1987 after finishing up a working World Cruise on the QE2 I moved to St. Louis, Mo. marrying a girl I had met whilst working for Cunard and I've been here ever since. When our children got to a suitable age I tried introducing them to the S&As, but whether its computer games or just the urban environment in which they live for some reason they didn't take to them.

However as I had bought a new copy of SW, before I let my 2 boys loose on it, I had to read it again and of course I was hooked once more, and with David Godine's annual release I updated every year getting immense pleasure out of reading them again, and even more pleasure out of reading the titles that I hadn't read before. I am at present 2/3 way through *Great Northern?* and enjoying every moment, especially as a Great Northern Diver was one bird that as a kid I had always wanted to see.

I still maintain the house in Devon that my Dad left me and hope that sometime in the next 5-6 years my wife and I can explore the Dartmoor, Tarka the Otter country, and also make another pilgrimage to the Norfolk Broads and the Lake District. Meanwhile, it's great to have discovered TARSUS.

Les Jenkins
St. Louis, Missouri

Glenn Shea (Autumn, 2005)

I have had the *Swallows and Amazons* books under my nose any number of times without taking special notice of them, particularly during a few weeks in 1986 spent walking the Lake District and five years working in the bookshop at the Mystic Seaport in Connecticut.

But a few years ago I began working at the Book Barn, a secondhand book shop in Niantic, Connecticut, read a few of the Ransomes as they came in and began talking them over with co-work Chuck Howard, another Ransome enthusiast. (The Barn almost never has any Ransome in stock because Chuck and I are always buying them up and pressing them on friends). In 2003 I used my tax refund check to order the Jonathan Cape hardcovers in parcels of twos and threes until I had, and had read, the entire set.

Once finished, I started on my second time through, Chuck got me copies of the videos, and then discovered the Ransome Society via their website.

It's been fun to read the TARSUS resumes and the newsletters and to discover that I am not the only non-sailor to enjoy the stories. It's been fun too to see people weighing in with their opinions. Though some of the books are better than others, I don't think there's a really bad one in the lot, and I for one think the oft-picked-on *The Picts and the Martyrs* to be perhaps the funniest book in the series. As for Ransome's illustrations versus Helen Carter's or Mary Shephard's, I think Ransome's own pictures hit just the right unsentimental note.

I'm a Connecticut native who has worked as a bookseller for almost thirty years. The Book Barn, where I'm working now, has three goats, two dogs, eighteen cats, twelve humans, seven buildings and over 250,000 used books and is a terrific place to visit (directions are on the store's website, www.bookbarnniantic.com.) Any Ransome fans traveling in the area are encouraged to come on in and say Karabangbaraka.

Glenn Shea
Niantic, Connecticut

Rob Marshall (Autumn, 2006)

I am a returning past member from 97/98.

I was born in London England, though spent most my life from the age of 4 on the South Coast around the Brighton/Worthing area. In 1977 I moved to the US together with my wife and two children, for lived for a few years in Northern Virginia then to my present home in Bradenton Florida Just south of Tampa.

My Brother introduced me to the Ransome books when I was about 10. From then on I was an avid fan, and together with a school friend who was as keen as me. We explored the harbors and coast of the area trying to relive the books. Our adventures sometimes caused consternation amongst the natives of some villages we visited as we tried walking down the middle of the streets as true explorers do. Fortunately the traffic was a good deal less than today's.

As I went into my teens Swallows and Amazons seemed less appealing as ones mind was set on other things. This led to pretty much forgetting them until in 97 on a visit to England when I visited the Windermere Museum and I rediscovered the joy of reading the books again.

I had during the time of living in VA until 3 years ago been involved amateur motor sports and this tended once again make me lose interest somewhat, but a bad accident on track fortunately with no injury to me had me realize it was time to give that up. I then obtained more of the books and began reading Tarboard which made me become a True aficionado again.

Currently I am involved with a project restoring a 57 ketch the *Galatea* which is a replica of Joshua Slocums *Spray*. This is to be used in a project called Aquarian Quest to educate children on the joy of sailing and the coastal environment.

<http://www.aquarianquest.org/about.html>

I am also a member of The Traditional Small Craft Association and the Florida Gulf Coast Maritime Museum

<http://www.tsca.net/FGCTSCA/> with whom I plan to construct a Sailing Skiff.

It is my dream to take my five grandchildren on this and try to show them something of the Ransome adventures

Rob

Bradenton, W. Florida

Elizabeth Jolley (May 2009)

I have been an avid fan of the Swallows & Amazons series since the day I came across the first book in my new school library. At the supper table, I started to tell my family all about this great new book I had found, and my mother was delighted to realize that I had stumbled upon Swallows and Amazons. She had read all of the books as a child, finding the first three or four already in her library, and waiting as each new one was published. I could not find all of the books in school or my town at that time, but on a visit to my grandmother's home, I found the rest of the series in my mother's old childhood public library. You can imagine how I spent the rest of that vacation!

The year I was in 8th grade, our class had a trip to Canada to learn about their parliamentary government, but my personal focus was on how to get to the bookstore with the money we had saved up so I could buy THE WHOLE SERIES for us to have at home. Since that time, I have read and re-read the series many times, and shared them with my four children.

In 2000, we took a family trip to England to see the spots in the books, bringing my mother along for the fun. We stayed at Holly Howe Farm (Bank Ground Farm in real life), dipped our hands in the lake, climbed Kanchenjunga (The Old Man of Coniston), boated to Wildcat (Peel) Island, climbed to Trout (Beacon) Tarn through one possible Swallowdale, and rode the ferries on Coniston & Windermere lakes.

From London later in our vacation, we took a day trip to the Broads where we had a boat tour of the river from Wroxham to Horning, seeing Dick's birds of all sorts everywhere and imagining ourselves quanting along upriver.

On another trip in 2004 (who can go only once?) we found the igloo, climbed Kanchenjunga another way, sailed on the lake, visited the island again (now an old friend) and tried out another cottage at Holly Howe farm. Tons of fun; everyone who can get to England should go see the real places!

Gerard Mittelstaedt (May 2009)

I have been a member of TARSUS for a comparatively short time (only a few years.) Actually I should introduce myself...

I am Gerard Mittelstaedt, 60 years old, married father of 2 children, one grown (35 yrs) the other now 14 and in Boy Scouts. With mixed success I have taught both to sail in small dinghies (actually Winnard Sabot hulls with home-made Optimist-style sprit rigs). Down through the ages I have built several small boats, and enjoy doing so almost as much as sailing them. My wife, Mona, sometimes sails with me, but prefers sailing in Laguna Madre as she is prone to seasickness when offshore.

I was introduced to 'The Swallows and Amazons' when I was a child, by a librarian in San Antonio, Texas where the family lived 1958-1963. (Dad was in US Air Force and we moved a lot.) I read as many books from Ransome's series as I could get my hands on. I convinced my dad to buy a small sailboat (an 8ft. pram) and we learned to sail together. Later moves took us to Keesler AFB, which is in Biloxi, MS. Dad and I finished building a 16ft Prout catamaran there. I really enjoyed sailing on the back bay there, using the recreational dock facilities at the air base.

After graduating from University of Texas, Austin I worked for Western Geophysical on a survey boat in the Gulf of Mexico for a year. It was mostly great fun, but not a way of life for me. I went back to University, took some courses in Library Science and a basic computer course (programs written on punch cards!) and got a job at the Rosenberg Library, the Public Library in Galveston, where I bought and lived on a 30 ft. Tahiti ketch. Then after a year and a half shifted to McAllen, TX (where my parents lived) to the Public Library there. After a few years went back to University for the needful Masters Degree in Library Science. I wandered about for a few months, mostly the length of the east coast of USA from Maine to Florida visiting most of the maritime museums on the way having a big vacation before becoming employed again. I found my way home to Texas and a job back at the McAllen Memorial Library. Over time I worked my way up to the Directorship where I worked for some 27 more years and retired 2 years ago.

So there you have it. I am a retired librarian with a great feeling for sailing small boats, and building small boats, who happens to be a Scoutmaster for Troop 583. I find that TARSUS has members widely scattered, and that is a little frustrating. I would like to meet and talk Ransome and small sailboats some time with like-minded people. I maintain a website at <http://www.stexboat.com> which is a hobby website of mine. Here I put my ramblings about small boats, etc. One part which may be of more interest is at http://www.stexboat.com/mini_voyages/mini_voyages.htm which describes some of my wanderings in small boats.

Jessika Hodgson (May 2009)

I'm thirteen; my birthday is August 7th (near Bridgie's in the books). I have one sister and three bothers. I like to read, write, camp, explore, and travel (and a lot of other things, too). My favorite Swallows and Amazons character is Titty.

I live in Palmer Lake, Colorado, right in the foothills. Yes, there is a lake here, but no boating or swimming is allowed. There is

fishing, though. And lots of hiking.

I first read Swallows and Amazons when I was eleven. My aunt had given us the first two books, and my mom finally convinced me to read them. I actually thought they were the only books in the series; when I finished Swallowdale, thinking there were no more, I yelled and hit my pillow on the floor so hard it ripped in half (I have the temper of Nancy Blackett). I sure was glad when I figured out there were more adventures!

Mikaela Springsteen (May 2009+)

Hi! My name is Mikaela. I am 12 years old and live in NJ. I have an older sister and a Portuguese Water Dog. My grandpa got me started on Swallows and Amazons and is also in TARSUS. I enjoy doing many different things including boating, sailing, fishing, water tubing, hiking, camping and exploring in the summer. In the winter I like to go skiing and sledging. My dad and I built the sledge and christened her Wildcat. Year round I enjoy writing, reading, woodworking, and doing synchronized swimming. I hope you all like the first edition of Pieces of Eight and hope to hear from you!

Mackenzie Reid (May 2009)

Hello! My name is Mackenzie Reid and I am 14. Previous to 2007 I lived in the UK and was part of TARS. My family and I moved to Wilton, CT and instantly became members of TARSUS. I have been (I think it was 2006?) to the IAGM at Coniston, in the Lake District, where my sister and I had immense fun exploring Wild Cat Island, drinking grog, and visiting Holly Howe Farm. My mom introduced me to the books when I was about seven, and my favorite is definitely Swallows and Amazons. My Grandad used to teach in England, and then my Mom acquired the set of books. When she got a little older, she decided she didn't want them anymore; the school took them for use in the Library. After a while though, Mom decided she wanted the books back! Some had been ripped or even destroyed, but she took them all back. Our books are very special to our whole family, as they hold thousands of stories; by Ransome, and by lots of children and adults who have read them over the years. I cannot wait for the next issue of Signals to arrive! Remember; please conserve trees and energy by having it emailed to you!

Bennet Shaver (Autumn 2009)

Dear Elizabeth,

As a matter of interest, I am still sailing, at age 82, my 15 foot Marshall catboat which I keep at the house on a major tributary to the Chesapeake Bay. You won't be surprised to learn her name is "Swallow".

Any Tarsus or Tars members who visit the Annapolis area would be welcome to stop by and take Swallow for a spin. She handles just like her namesake. I visited the Lake country some 15 years ago and enjoyed a three hour sail on Windemere in a chartered 16 footer, of course.

Thanks for all you do for us.

Good luck, Bennett

Alan Scease (Autumn, 2009)

My dear Elizabeth,

Many thanks for stepping up to the plate. It is much appreciated by all of us 'lurkers'. Gets pretty cold & snowy here too. 10 " today to join 16 on the ground from last weekend.

I backed into Ransome via WW II . I had been reading S&A's for about two years and when my sister and I moved from London to Huddersfield during the Buzz bomb problem I was able to join a Boy Scout troop there. Our billet was on the northwest edge of town. A row of houses on the other side of the street and then a steep pasture to miles & miles of moors.

It was the summer holidays. So no school and we spent every day exploring. Paradise for a 14yo boy and his sister. Found a old sheep pen built into a stone wall and had our den and adventures there.

Our parents came to see us towards the end and we bullied them into making a special trip to the Lake District. After that I was 'hooked'. Ransome led to so many things. Sailing. I had a 34ft yawl on the Maine Coast for many years. Boy Scouts. Wasza Scoutmaster for a City of London Troop until I came to America in 1956. Books. Have 100 plus 'Ransome books' now.

I retired early. In 1989 I met Dick Weatherford {who started what became Alibris} and opened one of the first Internet search services [Lost Leaves BookSearch] and ran it for nearly 20 years from our home in Coastal Maine until my wife died last year.

I go back to England every three or four years and always spend a week in the Lakes.

Did not mean to carry on so.

Enjoy, Alan

Hannah Hodgson (May 2010)

My name is Hannah. I don't go by anything else except the occasional "Di" or "Didi". I am the sister of the editor Jessika, if you didn't notice by the last name. I learned about the Swallows and Amazons through my sister. I didn't really have any choice. She forced me into knowing, and I hated with a passion the series until I started reading them. I still haven't read the whole series, but thus far my favorite is Winter Holiday. I am probably a mix between the characters Peggy and Dick, though I'm not afraid of thunder and I don't keep a notebook of scientific figures (though I might soon if I keep up thinking of things such as p53 genes and DNA



(Editor's Note: I clicked the link and found a number of Kristin's paintings of cats & dogs, all very nicely done, and at the top of her page, this wonderful watercolor of a crofter's cabin on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland. This painting really made me think of Ransome for two reasons: 1) Kristin's hills are drawn much the way Ransome's hills around The Lake were, wavy lines showing the worn tops of the beautiful mountains, and 2) The Isle of Lewis is one possibility for the placement of Scrubber's Cove and all the action in the Scottish deerpark AR described in "Great Northern?!" Take a look at this gorgeous watercolor, and check out Kristin's site, too! Elizabeth)

I took the year of 2000-2001 off from college and spent six weeks that spring backpacking around England, Ireland, and Scotland. After traveling around England and Ireland, I took a train up to Inverness. I remember listening to Rush on my portable CD player. It was late April and it was so cold, the first thing I had to do when I got off the train was buy a wool sweater! There were not many tourists that year because of the Hoof and Mouth scare, and I had the youth hostels in northern Scotland practically to myself. I took a ferry from Ullapool to Stornoway and stayed in a crofter's hut on the very west coast of Lewis where I painted this watercolor. There were only two other people there. One was an elderly German gentleman who said he used to spend his vacations kayaking around the British Isles. He said that now that he was older, he backpacked instead. The other was an American in his forties who smoked a lot. The German guy and I didn't like him very much and he didn't stay very long. We thought that he ran out without paying his bill.

The land was rough, but beautiful, and the light was the most amazing that I have ever seen. Sunrises and sunsets stretched out for hours because it was so far north. The cold Atlantic crashed against the rocky beach. It was weird seeing the Atlantic to the west. There were more sheep than people. The bus only came to the crofter's hut once a day, and not at all on Sunday, but I managed to see the Callanish Standing Stones in the rain. There were two other people there-- a British couple in a rented car. I also managed to get into Stornoway often enough to keep stocked up on Cadbury Creme Eggs. Annapolis is home, parts of Italy and the Caribbean are lovely, but Lewis is the most beautiful place that I've ever been to.

David Gilles-Thomas (September 2010)

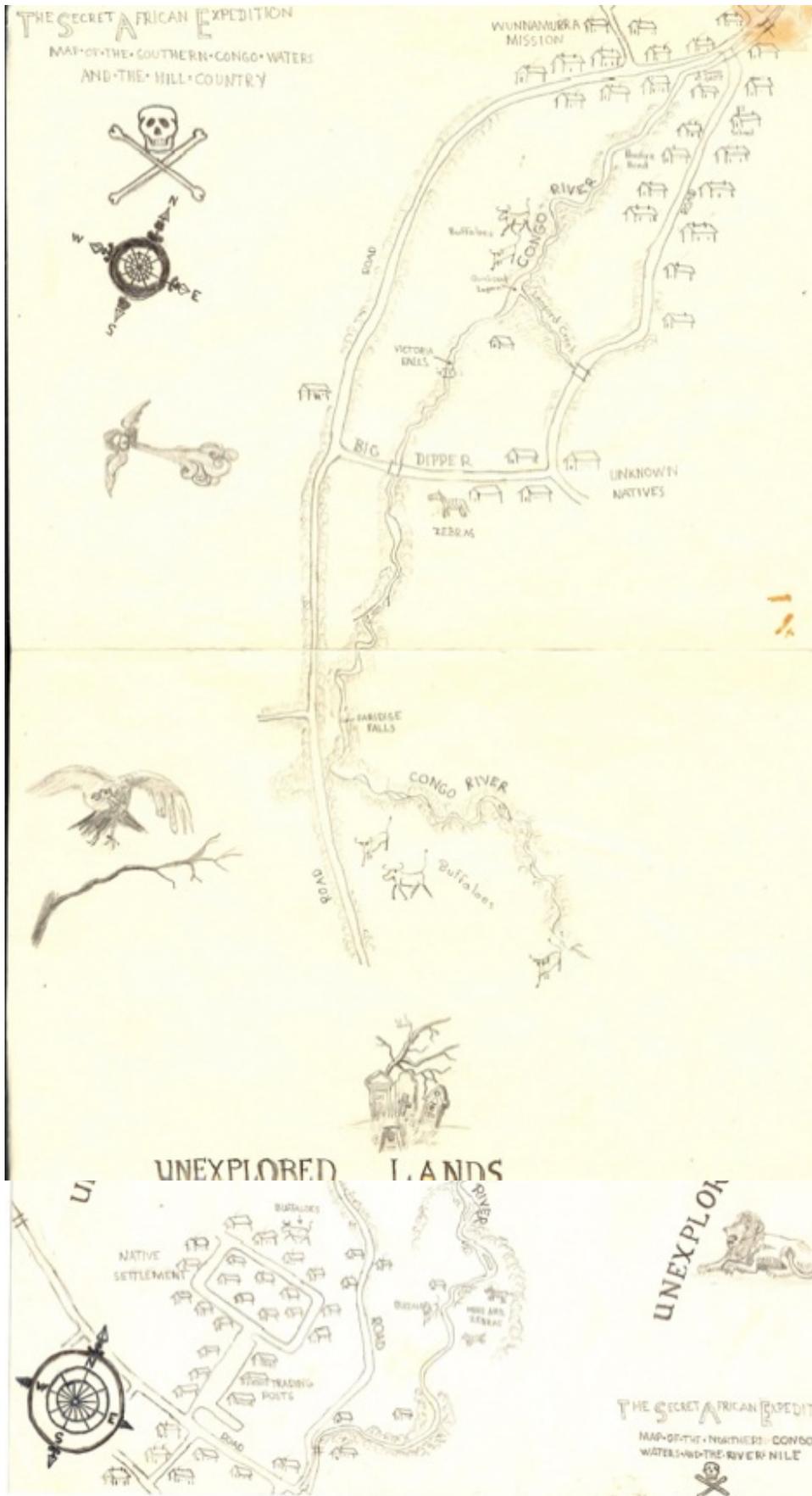
Here's some background about me:

I lived in England for one year, 1970-71, when my father, a university professor, was on sabbatical. We lived in a small village, Brookhouse, just outside of Lancaster. I went to school, 2nd form, at Bentham Grammar School. It was here in England that I discovered the Swallows & Amazons books. I forget who gave me the first book, probably a neighbor in the village. I immediately fell in love with the books. We hiked often in the Lake District, and I was forever imagining adventures and would often wish I could join the Swallows and Amazons. As that wasn't possible, I created my own adventures.

replication—that kind of stuff is fascinating!). I'd like to go and "dig up remains" like Professor Callum when I grow up. I like to think of myself as an author, and I am in the process of writing a book (maybe I have a little Dot in me too). I also like to think of myself as an artist, but I'm not really that good at drawing/painting. I play the violin. Hiking is my specialty, but I'd really like to go boating sometime. I'm a major C.S. Lewis fan, and of course I like Arthur Ransome too. Swallows and Amazons forever!

Kristin White (May 2010)

I grew up in Maryland and my parents gave me the Swallows and Amazons series to read when I was a kid. I studied art at Syracuse University and now I am a sailmaker at a small loft in Annapolis and also an artist. I've started a blog to show my artwork. It's called Paintings and Illustrations. The address is <http://kaswhite.blogspot.com> Take a look at it if you get the chance.



For example, a small stream ran behind our house, up into the moors, and I spent many a happy day, alone or with my sister or a friend, hiking it, mapping it out just as they mapped out their adventures in the books. I still have those maps after all these years. I've attached scans of two of the maps; the small one connects to the top of the long one to make a continuous map. There is a house marked with "Savage Camp" (just north of "Bonfire Bend"), which is where we lived: 2 Moorside Rd, Brookhouse, Lancaster, Lancashire LA2 9PJ. The River Nile refers to the Lune River. You can find it all on Google maps! The zebras were horses, and I believe Leopard Creek was named thus because I saw a black cat there. I just visited Google maps, and I must say I did a pretty good job at the maps. I also discovered that Google maps has the entire area now mapped with their "street view", so I just took a lovely "stroll" up the street into the moors. Sweet memories. I do miss England.

When we returned, my parents bought a small sailboat for a lake they have a cabin on here in Western New York, and I was so surprised how much I had learned from the books about sailing -- I just knew what to do, and enjoyed sailing about the lake, although I never completely got over my fear of capsizing! Perhaps that makes me a duffer. Ha ha!

I am 52 years old now, and have children of my own. My enjoyment of these books is being passed on to my children as we read the books together. For me, one of the greatest things about Ransome's books is that they teach us to find wonder and adventure in everyday life. When the creek behind your house can become the Congo River, and a cat can be a leopard that is quite a gift.

And so, you will see this influence in the clues for the Swallows & Amazon letterbox I created. Although not directly related to the books, the clues were definitely written with the spirit of the books in mind. Everyday events and objects take on something magical. For example the "native spear" noted on the map is just a metal pole stuck in the water of the pond. ... or is it?

Maybe it really is a spear. You never know!!

Cheers, David