



SIGNALS FROM T•A•R•S•U•S

May 2004

This is the Spring 2004 issue of *Signals from TARSUS*, and you have probably noticed that it showed up on its own without any accompanying U.K. publications. You should have received the short mailing directly from the U.K. in April containing AGM information and a brief discussion of the reorganization of TARS publications. In the process, there wasn't an April *Signals* (other than the 4-page flyer you received) and *The Outlaw* has been delayed until the August mailing. Rather than simply not send a U.S. newsletter, however, it seemed better to distribute this one on our own.

In this issue we have the third "namesake animals" article from Molly McGinnis, the second installment of the Kenya series from Des Kelsall, and a short history of the Jolly Roger from Claire Barnett, in addition to our regular column from Mary Wessel Walker and Ransome Readers Recommend. In addition, the TARS Canada Quiz returns after being absent from the February 2004 newsletter..

Welcome

A very warm welcome to Pam Adams (CA); Lincoln King (TX); Amy McCoy (WA); Albert Price (CA); Joel Silverberg, Patricia Brennan and Sarah Mae Silverberg (RI); Robert Urquhart, Jennifer Pap, and Catriona and Marina Urquhart (CO) who have joined TARS and TARSUS since our last newsletter.

Exchange Rate

Remember that our new (as of 1 October 2003) exchange rate for transactions handled by the U.S. Coordinator with the U.K. is **\$1.70 = £1.00**. This applies for everything TARSUS members pay for through the Coordinator, including membership application and renewal, TARS Stall items, etc.

Change of Contact Information for Coordinator

A final reminder that my address and telephone numbers changed in early February. New contact information is at the end of this newsletter.

Résumés

Molly McGinnis, the author of the wonderful "Namesake Animals" articles (of which the third appears in this newsletter) has send her Résumé which is included with this newsletter. Again I would encourage all TARSUS members who have not yet sent one to please do so; it is always fascinating to learn about fellow Ransome enthusiasts.

Special Thanks

As with so many newsletter editors, I regularly whine (that's "whinge" for U.K. readers) for contributions, especially reviews for Ransome Readers Recommend. This time I've received so many that I cannot print them all in this issue, so if you sent me a review which doesn't appear here, it should appear in our Summer issue due out in August. And thanks to every one who sent in an article or review.

Three Million Cheers for the contributors!

Feature Column: Ransome Readers Recommend

The Elizabeth Enright books

Reviewed by Eric Benke

Admirers of the *Swallows and Amazon* series might enjoy reading Elizabeth Enright's books. The first series, about the Melendy family, comprises four books - *The Saturdays*, *The Four-Story Mistake*, *Then There Were Five*, and *Spiderweb for Two*. Enright (the architect Frank Lloyd Wright's niece, I believe) illustrated these stories as well. The second series, *Gone-Away Lake* and *Return to Gone-Away*, were more recent and were, as far as I know, only illustrated by others.

The Melendy family series reminds me of Ransome in several ways, though the setting and characters are thoroughly American. The adults are largely absent (not so much so as in AR's stories) and those who do interact are often in the servant class - though, like Ransome's characters, they are often well-liked by the children. The family consists of an eldest daughter (a budding actress and beauty), a boy (athlete and pianist), a younger girl (dancer) and a youngest child, a boy, who fishes and collects insects. The four of them engage in various individual and group adventures.

Like the Walkers, Callums, and Blacketts, these children are fully-drawn, distinct characters who throw themselves into a variety of activities. These tend to be less about serious play-acting than the Ransome Characters' activities, and more grounded in the real world, but no less engaging. They let us into a world of independent young people who are healthy, energetic and capable of making their own lives interesting. The first book is set in the city but the sequels - and the family - move to the countryside. The writing is clear and at times eloquent and gently humorous; more humor than one finds in Ransome.

The second series, *Gone-Away Lake* and *Return...* are fine books but the characters are not quite as fully drawn or engaging. Still, they also are recommended. The Melendy series is set in pre-war and wartime America (late 30's to late 40's) and the second series is mid-50's. They don't include sailing or a lot of outdoorsmanship. Enright's illustrations are quite good but simple. All together, I think any Ransome fan would enjoy these works for the general atmosphere and realistic concentration on appealing young peoples' active lives.

Cache Lake Country: Life in the North Woods by John J. Rowlands

Reviewed by Jerry Crouch

I cannot let pass David Thewlis's appeal for book reviews without writing something about one of my favorite books - *Cache Lake Country: Life in the North Woods* by John J. Rowlands. It is a book about the lake country of the Canadian north woods, the land of the old voyageurs. It is a country of deep forests - and deep snows in the winter - of swamps and rocky ridges, of lakes large and small and the rivers joining them. Perhaps a brief quotation from the beginning of the book will give a taste of its flavor:

"After I ... came out on the small lake, I stopped paddling like a fellow will when he sees new water for the first time. The sun had come up and mist hung motionless like a big cobweb just above the surface... The tall pine tops were moving in the first soft breeze of morning and as the mist drifted away dark shadows began to edge across the water... Then as the sun cleared the hills and turned the still black water into shining gold, I remembered. This was the lake of my boyhood dreams!"

Rowlands goes on to tell how he came to settle on the shores of Cache Lake, as he called the small lake, and to describe his life there in a series of chapters running from January through December. He writes with pleasure about the doings and adventures that occupy each month. Ransome's readers will no doubt be drawn to Roland's love of the out-of-doors and the practical lore he imparts about living in the woods and making useful gadgets out of ordinary materials. In the book Rowland tells, for instance, how to shape a canoe paddle by hand, how to make a pair of moccasins, how to build a fireless cooker, even how to make a crystal radio as well as many other useful things. An appealing feature of the book,

for me at least, are the many ink drawings that fill its pages. Some are simply decorative motifs of woods life, others illustrate the handicrafts, and yet others depict scenes from the Cache Lake country – all enliven the book and add to the pleasure of reading it.

Though Rowlands did not address his book to youthful readers, he writes with such clarity and simplicity and, withal, such vividness that his book should engage young and old alike. In the character of Rowlands himself, readers of the S&A series may see a quieter, more patient, and perhaps wiser Captain Flint. As the opening quotation suggest the book is about a life that many a young person dreams of, of adventure in the wilds away from the trammels of society but made comfortable by one's own inventiveness and self-reliance. Once you read it, I believe *Cache Lake Country* will become one of your favorites too.

Originally published in 1947, the book is currently available in a paperback edition from the Countryman Press.



Namesake Animals from the Swallows & Amazons Books

Molly McGinnis

The Wildcat

Felis sylvestris sylvestris Wildcat (All the Lake books)

Where is the wildcat of Wildcat Island? The island isn't shaped like a wildcat, and there's no story about a wildcat or a cat gone wild (a feral cat) in any of the books. But was there once a wildcat or a feral cat on a Lake island? Did AR have thoughts of a real wildcat when he named the island? One of Ransome's favorite books was *Thorstein of the Mere*, where there is a fight between the hero and a wildcat on an island in a lake. I like the idea of a wildcat being a secret symbol inspiring the author to keep on!

There is a genuine wild cat, the European Wildcat (*Felis sylvestris sylvestris*), but not in England –the last English wildcat was shot in Northumberland in 1849, and wildcats had been extinct in the south since the 1500's. (Californians take note: yours is the only state in the union which has an extinct animal for its totem so don't get uppity! The last Grizzly bear ever seen in California was shot in 1927; the last wild passenger pigeon for forever was shot in Ohio in 1900.) A very few wildcats remain in Scotland.

And what is a "wildcat"? There are truly wild cats all over Europe, the drier parts of Africa, and east into the dry parts of India and Central Asia. They were originally named *Felis sylvestris*, and then as more became known about wildcats the species was divided into three and then many "subspecies". The ancestor of our pets (*Felix catus*) was *Felis sylvestris Libica*, found in dry habitats all over Africa (which includes Arabia –"scientifically", as Dick might say, Sinbad was a very good name for the Ship's Kitten!). All the subspecies can interbreed, but generally don't --for one thing, the groups are widely separated. Interbreeding between subspecies generally happens when territories that were separated become joined again. The wildcat is protected in many places but it's not out of danger, especially the European group (which includes Scotland's few), because it can't adapt to living near humans. And the domestic cat may be interbreeding with true wildcats, diluting the gene pools of the wild kinds.

The European group of wildcats is called the *Sylvestris* group and the British and European wildcats are called *Felis sylvestris sylvestris*. (A subspecies has an extra Latin name.) Besides *Felix libica* there is the "Indian" group which also lives in desert areas; its range is India, extending well into the far East.

The European Wildcat is the most untameable, the most secretive, and the least tolerant of humans of all the three groups, and it is also the most heavily furred and the largest –which is what biologists expect of northern representatives of a species. It can grow to 17 lb. (8kg), bigger than most housecats. *F. s. sylvestris* has the smallest range of the three groups, being found only in the northern parts of Western Europe, except Scandinavia, and in a tiny area in Scotland. The Scottish wildcat has earned its own name, *Felis sylvestris grampia*, and a place on the Red List (note for Americans: a Red List species is like a US "Endangered" species), though recently there are some grumbles about it not being a "pure" enough

wildcat to be either named or listed. (A listed species is one given “protective status” on one of the American or International Lists) because of supposed interbreeding with domestic cats. Large built-up areas surround *F. s. grampia*’s territory and it is barely holding its own.

The European Wildcat is gray and black tabby striped just like two of my pets, but the coat is very thick (thicker yet in winter) and the tail fur is even thicker so that the tail looks blunt or rounded at the end. (One of my pet cats has a tail like that too –she uses it for a nose warmer in cold weather.) A Wildcat would look bigger than a domestic cat of the same size because of the heavy fur. European Wildcats live in forests (that’s what “sylvestris” means) but the African and Indian Wildcats are desert and plains animals. The European Wildcat survives even in very swampy forests, going from tree to tree, and wildcats could undoubtedly swim to Wildcat Island –in the days when there were any. Wildcats prey on rodents and rabbits (the Grampian wildcat is a rabbit/ hare specialist) and will take other small creatures –insects, reptiles, birds, frogs, birds’ eggs, and the like. The European Wildcat even takes carrion, which is rather untypical of the cat family. (I have expanded the usual food lists, from observing what our own farm pets and the semi-wild visitors take) Wildcats will cache their food –carry it off and hide it, something not many felids do. (Americans: This is typical of the American Mountain Lion also.)

I can’t find reports of any effort to re-establish the Wildcat in England. There are accounts of sightings of “wildcats” but so far these have turned out to be feral cats or zoo escapes. A few domestic cats (*Felis catus*, worldwide distribution) are able to survive in the wild and for the most part reclaim the feeding niches of small predators made extinct by humans. When they’re introduced where animals evolved without small predators (for instance, some islands) they make their own niche and can be a threat to the prey populations. In Britain, both domestic and feral cats are maligned as predators on birds, but this seems to me to overlook the fact that British birds evolved with small carnivores and omnivores which feed on birds and their eggs. These –including the true Wildcat— have been systematically eliminated over the last several hundred years and I think it likely that domestic cats have simply replaced lost predators.

A good website to check for Wildcat information is: <http://www.lioncrusher.com/animal.asp?animal=72>. For another interesting discussion check: <http://www.messybeast.com/cathistory.htm>.

Does this answer the question, “Where are the Wildcats of Wildcat Island?” Not exactly! See “The Parley” (S&A) and here’s a clue:



A Fisheries Officer on Lake Victoria (2)

Des. Kelsall

It soon became clear that most of the gill nets used were hand-braided from J. & P. Coates’ cotton sewing thread, at a cost of only seven shillings & sixpence per net. Machine-made flax nets were available but cost 30/- per net. Coir rope and locally available materials were used to mount the nets and the useful life of these cotton nets seldom exceeded a month.

As an experiment, a supply of hand-made nylon nets was obtained from South Africa. I was given some of these and told to sell them to any interested fisherman “at cost”, which was Shs. 75 per net. Compared to the cost of a locally made net, this posed a tough sales problem! However, after some thought I developed a technique which seemed to work. Equipped with a few nets and a ball of the twine from which they were made, I would visit a lakeside fishing camp, where I gathered the fishermen under a shady tree. I would briefly explain the advantages of the new nets and allow the fishermen to handle them. To demonstrate the strength of the twine I would then break off a yard or so from the ball, using the dodge of snapping parcel twine, which made it seem easy to break, and hand it to the man nearest me, inviting him to try to break it as I had just done. He would carefully wind it several times around one index finger and then round the other and give it a tremendous jerk, clearly expecting it to snap as it had done with me. Alas, all that happened was that the twine inflicted a deep cut on one or both of his fingers, from which the blood dripped. Howls of mirth from all his friends, who accused him of being just a weakling. I would then confirm this, by snapping the twine again using the same dodge.

This rather cruel demonstration seemed to convince the fishermen of the remarkable quality of the twine. (They were, like all fishermen, pretty shrewd judges!) One or two would hesitantly come forward, tendering cash and innocently suggesting a discount on the price (which I could not give). They would take a single net to try and evidently had no difficulty over finding the necessary cash. Set as part of a fleet of ordinary cotton nets, the nylon net, by reason of the softness and lower visibility of the nylon, would invariably catch more fish than the nets on either side of it. This led to the nylon nets being christened “chapa sumaku” (magnet brand) because they seemed to draw fish into them. As their effectiveness became known among the fishermen there was an increasing demand for these magical nets and it was not long before I had sold all my quota of 50.

(On a historical note, so great did the demand for these nets become over the next two or three years, that the Japanese, never slow to spot a developing market, were exporting to East Africa large quantities of various sizes of nylon nets which retailed at a fraction of the cost of the British-made equivalent. They eventually set up a net factory in Dar-es-salaam, the prices went lower still and the British manufacturers were priced out of the market.)

To be continued.



A History of the Jolly Roger

Claire Barnett

Have you ever wondered why the pirate skull and crossbones flag is called the Jolly Roger ? Did you know that its source is also tied into Friday the 13th being an unlucky day, and possibly even the origin of the treasure at Oak Island?

The answer to these questions lies hundreds of years before the classic pirate era. The skull and crossbones was among the symbols of The Knights Templar, a religious military order who fought in the Holy Land during the time of the Crusades. After the Europeans were forced out of the Holy Land, the Templars continued the fight with their fleet, preying on Moslem shipping. Later, fearing their power and wanting to seize the Order's wealth, King Phillip IV of France and Pope Clement V, ordered surprise arrests and seizures on Friday October 13th 1307. Memory of that attack lives on in considering a Friday the 13th to be unlucky.

Although many Templars were arrested, tortured and executed, some of them escaped with their fleet of ships and engaged in piracy. There is speculation that they found refuge in Scotland, and that together with the Sinclairs, visited the New World one hundred years before Columbus, leaving the mysterious stone ruins in New England. It is also speculated that they may have been responsible for the complex engineering at Oak Island Nova Scotia, and it may be their treasure that lies there.

On the high seas, their policy of no quarter given, was symbolized by a red flag, which in French was the Jolie Rouge. By the 17th and 18th centuries, the details were fading, but the memories of the Templar skull and crossbones symbol and the French name for the Red Flag were taken over by pirates as we know them.

For more details see <http://skullandcrossbones.org/articles/jolly-roger.htm>.



From TARS Canada:

Here are the answers for the quiz on *Coot Club* from our November, 2003 newsletter (sorry again for skipping the February 2004 newsletter), along with the questions for the next quiz on *Pigeon Post*. Yet three million more cheers for TARS Canada to allow us to crib off their newsletter.

COOT CLUB - Answers to the Questions

ONE POINT

1.1 By motor launch; 1.2 Beccles; 1.3 A pug; 1.4 Dreadnought; 1.5 Mrs McGinty; 1.6 On the bank, beyond a fringe of reeds; 1.7 Aged Parent; 1.8 Chocolate; 1.9 A quant; 1.10 The Come Along; 1.11 Red and Black; 1.12 A roger; 1.13 Mrs Dudgeon; 1.14 Cod-liver oil; 1.15 The steersman had switched directly from "full ahead" to "full astern" and wrenched the propeller off its shaft; 1.16 It was cut loose and drifted away.

TWO POINTS

2.1 Bure [or North River]; 2.2 A bream; 2.3 Jim Wooddall; 2.4 Seven; 2.5 Weeding for someone in the village; 2.6 Five mph; 2.7 Port was Bess and Starboard was Nell; 2.8 She dropped swans' feathers overboard and picked them up again on the far side of the river; 2.9 To have the Teasel's battery recharged; 2.10 Her name was painted out and a rope fender draped around her; 2.11 In case the boat drifted away and no experienced sailor were left aboard; 2.12 Pug Street; 2.13 Simon [Fastgate]; 2.14 The Berney Arms; 2.15 Welcome of Rochester; 2.16 Rodley's.

THREE POINTS

3.1 Thorpe; 3.2 At a conference of archaeologists at Hadrian's Wall; 3.3 A heron; frogging; 3.4 Painting pictures of notables from India; 3.5 "Cats! William, Bad Cats!"; 3.6 A farm boy coming with a can of milk; 3.7 Mr Farland, and then Dr and Mrs Dudgeon (with Our Baby); 3.8 Because he had spent the fourpence telephone money on bananas and made himself sick; 3.9 You are a Hard Worker and Should Become Successful; 3.10 A slab of chocolate cream; 3.11 Stokesby; 3.12 Mr Whittle and Mr Hawkins; 3.13 Bowline and bowline on the bight; fisherman's and carrick bends; rolling, Blackwall, timber and handspike hitches; cat's paws and sheepshanks; eye and long splices; grommets, selvagee strop; Turk's head; 3.14 A package with William's chocolate, cod-liver oil and favourite spoon; 3.15 James, Ronald and 'Livy; 3.16 One shilling.

PIGEON POST

ONE POINT

- 1.1 Who was steering *Amazon* when she came to meet Titty and Roger off the train?
- 1.2 What had Susan got for her birthday and brought camping?
- 1.3 What happened in Beckfoot when Homer was the first to ring Dick's finished pigeon alarm?
- 1.4 What did Nancy call her and Peggy's bicycles?
- 1.5 What did Nancy hang from her and Peggy's bicycles before starting on the trek to camp?
- 1.6 What animal did Titty see on the path above Tyson's farm when she went on her own to try dowsing at "Might-Have-Been?"
- 1.7 When the prospectors went to sink Titty's well, what did Mrs Tyson's son suggest they would need if they were digging in the wood?
- 1.8 Who found the gold mine?
- 1.9 What did Susan cook, the evening Roger went missing?

- 1.10 What did the prospectors use to pan for gold dust?
- 1.11 What happened to the pigeon the prospectors sent to announce the discovery of the gold?
- 1.12 When some of the younger members went prospecting after the finding of the gold mine, what were they looking for?
- 1.13 Who led the party through the Old Level after the roof had collapsed?
- 1.14 What did Dick and Squashy Hat buy one after the other in Rio?
- 1.15 Who was the first to wake in camp and realise there was a grass fire?
- 1.16 Which pigeon was sent for help at the time of the grass fire on High Topps?

TWO POINTS

- 2.1 Why were Dick and Dorothea's parents not with them at the Lake?
- 2.2 Why were Bridget and her mother not with the rest of the Swallows at the Lake?
- 2.3 Who was the organiser of the fell fire fighters?
- 2.4 Who was in the pioneering party that went to scout for a camping place on High Topps?
- 2.5 What was the name of Mrs Tyson's son, and what was he doing when the prospectors first arrived at Tyson's farm?
- 2.6 When the prospectors went up to High Topps the day of their arrival at Tyson's farm, who first spotted Squashy Hat?
- 2.7 What kind of boots did Squashy Hat wear?
- 2.8 Who was the first to suggest that there probably was water at "Camp Might-Have-Been", and what was the reason given?
- 2.9 The evening Titty went on her own to try dowsing at "Might-Have-Been", why was Roger so convinced something good was going to happen?
- 2.10 When the prospectors were trying to shift the big rock as they were digging Titty's well, what did Roger cry as encouragement?
- 2.11 When Mrs Blackett came to see Titty's well and the place the prospectors wanted to camp, what happened that she said would please Mrs Tyson and make her more amenable to their being there?
- 2.12 Who were the first and second to use the crushing mill once the prospectors started mining?
- 2.13 Who was in the Old Level when the roof fell in?
- 2.14 When the group that had been through the Old Level reappeared over Ling Scar, what name did Nancy call them in Morse code?
- 2.15 When Dick heated a little of the gold dust on a piece of charcoal, it formed into a drop of metal. What happened when Dick cut it with his pocket knife?
- 2.16 In the morning after keeping the blast furnace going all night, who went down for the milk and to face Mrs Tyson in the morning?

THREE POINTS

- 3.1 What was Slater Bob doing, the first time the prospectors went to visit him?
- 3.2 According to Slater Bob's story, why didn't the government geologist who found the gold vein exploit it?
- 3.3 What were Mrs Blackett's three conditions for allowing the prospectors to leave her garden for High Topps?
- 3.4 When Susan made dinner for everyone, including Mrs Blackett, the second night the children were all together in the Beckfoot garden, what ingredient did Susan say would have made her pemmican better had she remembered it?
- 3.5 Who went in *Amazon* on the shopping expedition to Rio the day the pioneers were looking for a camp site on High Topps?
- 3.6 On the shopping expedition to Rio the day the pioneers were looking for a camp site on High Topps, what did Titty rush into the stationer's to buy at the last moment?
- 3.7 What book did Dick borrow from Captain Flint's study to take to camp?
- 3.8 Why did all the Swallows wear rubber-soled boots?
- 3.9 What was the name of the fell where Squashy Hat painted his white spots?
- 3.10 When the prospectors had the first cup of water from Titty's well, what did Dick do to check when the water was clear of suspended sediment?
- 3.11 What was Nancy's explanation for the white spots that Squashy Hat was painting on the fellside?
- 3.12 The first night John and Roger went to sleep in and guard the gulch, what was the final message flashed back to camp by Roger?
- 3.13 How did the prospectors know that the matchbox left in the gulch while they were all away was not one of theirs?
- 3.14 When the grass fire reached the gulch and Squashy Hat tried to make John go into the mine before him, what did John say?
- 3.15 What did Dick use in Captain Flint's study to test if the metal the prospectors had found was really gold?
- 3.16 When Dick explained to Captain Flint that he had assumed that Timothy was an armadillo, what was the reply?



From our 10-Gong Contributing Editor Mary Wessel Walker:

Top Ten Ransome-ish Things To Do This Summer

I know that not all of us have the opportunity to sail off to an uninhabited island and camp there for weeks on end, but that doesn't mean there's nothing we can do in the spirit of the Swallows and Amazons. Here are my favorite ideas for summer activities:

1. Fly a kite! It's almost like sailing in some regards. It's especially fun if you make your own kite; check out a book from the library for directions.

2. Learn how to cook something. Be like Susan and Dorothea by learning to feed hungry explorers. If possible, try cooking on a campfire or camp stove. Try making some Ransome favorites, such as eggs and tea. Spam makes pretty good pemmican, we've found. Remember to have an adult help you with the kitchen because stoves and ovens are hot!
3. Make a map of your backyard or a local park like the Swallows do in Secret Water. Give landmarks better names.
4. Learn Morse code and semaphore. Practice with your friends and siblings. Baffle the natives. Learn to quack like a duck and hoot like an owl to signal in secret.
5. Write a story about the adventure you'd like to have, as Dorothea does.
6. Read books. If you like sailing adventures, try *All Sail Set* by Armstrong Sperry, or *Sailing Alone Around the World* by Joshua Slocum. If you just like good stories about children having a good time, try the Austin books by Madeline L'Engle. They start with *Meet the Austins*, but my favorite is *The Young Unicorns*. If you're up for a challenge, try Titty's favorite, *Robinson Crusoe*. Write a review for Ransome Readers Recommend!
7. Think like Titty and Mrs. Barrable and write paper letters to your friends and family. Everyone loves getting real mail.
8. Sing sea-chanties. Get a book from the library and learn some sea chanties. Yeo-ho!
9. Go swimming. Practice diving for pearls. Walk the plank from a diving board. Learn to cannonball.
10. Take a hike with some friends. Climb your local Kanchanjunga or just take a nice walk in the woods. Don't forget to leave pattarans.

About the author: Mary is a philosophy major and math minor at Bryn Mawr College. This summer she will be working on the Community Farm of Ann Arbor (Michigan) where she expects to do a lot of sailing, reading and quilting.



Next issue will feature the yearly map showing the distribution of TARSUS members in the United States, some more Ransome Readers Recommend that we didn't have room for this time, and the contributions I'm confident will keep coming in! And why not have a TARS event and write it up for the newsletter?

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NEW RESUME

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...

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