



Out of the Ocean

Where did it come from?

AN ESSAY BY DEBRA FRASIER

When people first began to ask me, “What is the greatest influence on your life as a writer?” I had to stop and think. Years of authors and books sifted through my mind, and the question seemed too large to answer simply. I would stumble for an answer... “William Stafford, the poet,” or “Hearing THE Answer.” But I knew this wasn’t The Answer:

Being a slow writer who revises endlessly, I came to understand the answer only after time let the truth settle to the sandy bottom: “Growing up on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean,” I am able to say now.

In 1958 my parents purchased 115 feet of oceanfront property just north of Vero Beach, Florida, where they built a house out of salvaged lumber. My brother and I found ourselves ending the school day at the last stop on a long and lonely bus ride up Highway A-1-A.

But growing up beside the ocean filled my life with the daily rhythms of spectacular cloud shows, rolling waves, and endless walks along a stretch of beach that never seemed the same. I learned that wind is a language constantly written on the surface of water, and that the language of water responds eloquently with how a wave cracks or rolls. And the tides helped teach me the language hidden within objects. Every day stories arrived with whatever washed up on the sand. Our wide beach porch grew thick with pieces of life from all over the world, things floating in from above sea level as well as below.

When I was about eight years old, I found a piece of weathered packing crate, smooth and gray except for a row of faded black Japanese characters painted down one side. I didn’t actually meet someone from Japan until many years later; but I knew, with wisdom far beyond the scope of my short life, that the world was huge yet connected by the same water. This board was evidence that maybe there was an eight-year-old-girl like me, living somewhere beyond the horizon, and that somewhere between the two of us, our oceans touched.

Standing on the beach, my family watched the first rockets blast off from Cape Canaveral, all eyes following and counting the flaming rocket stages dropping off into the distant water. Later we found twisted tangles of rocket wires on the rising tides, but the biggest thing the space program gave me was the photograph of Earth, spinning in space. That picture proved what I thought when I looked out at the curving horizon: Earth is blue and covered with ocean. On the Day You Were Born, a picture book I wrote and illustrated three decades later, tried to say just how that view of our planet gave me my own sense of place—on a beach in Florida—and a sense of our children’s place, wherever they are born.

On April 25, 1995, my mother called to tell me that after five years of thinking about selling their house, my parents had found a buyer for the family beach homestead. ON that very same day, I finished the last entry in the Ocean Journal, glossary section of *Out of the Ocean*. This book is my attempt to tell a story, in the language of wind, water, and sky, about what the sea brings us.

Oceans cover much of our planet, keeping us all connected with the simple astonishing beauty of rising and falling water. When you walk along the shore, see if you can hear what the ocean’s language is telling you. Like me, you may find the conversation offers the most important education of your life.

