

Upwellings

Abby Main '24

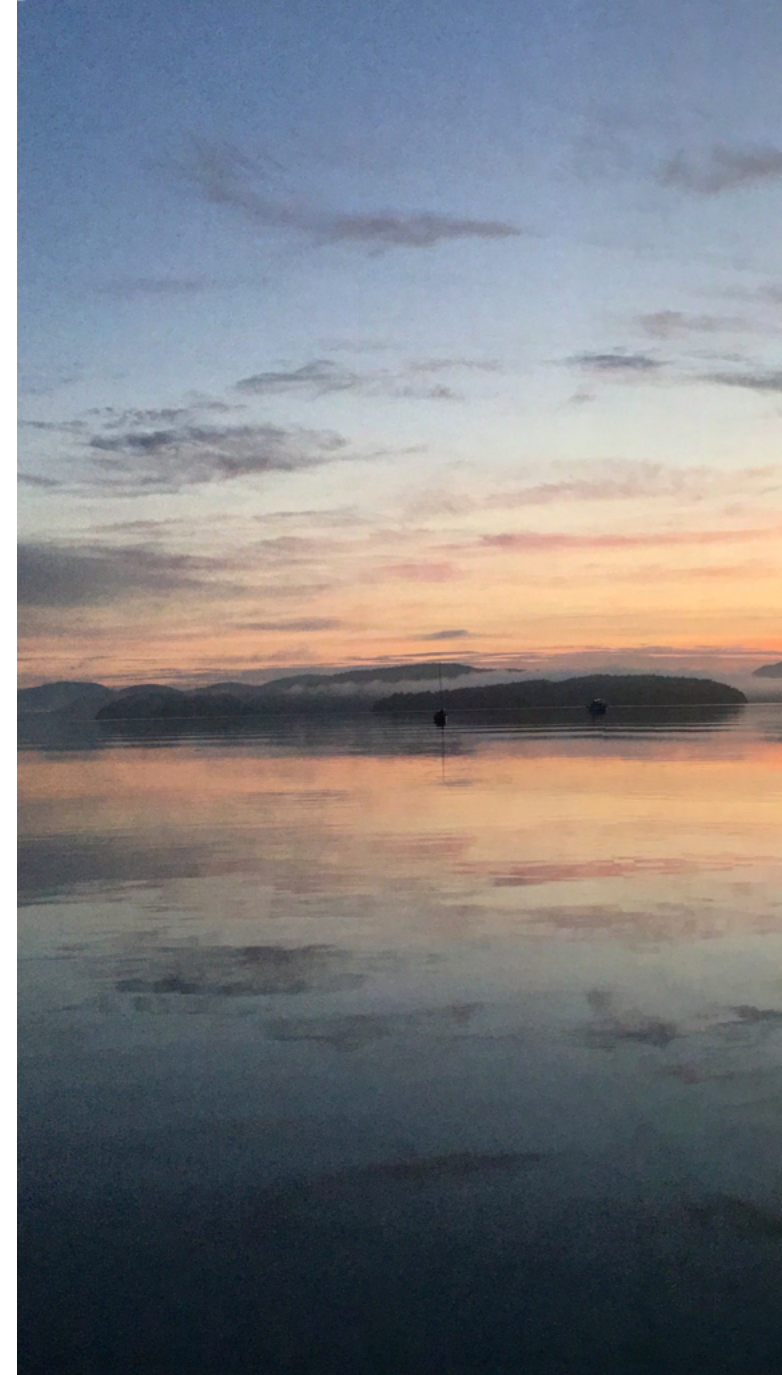
I

The currents at Turn Point, offshore from the light station bluff just a few feet, reach with myriad arms to dance with wave-cut platforms. Pebbles thrown to a sheltered corner of the Pacific, these islands settle in the water with strange ripples. Sibling landforms interrupt their concentric circles. Their masses conduct symphonies of tides, and the seafloor drops hundreds of meters without so much as a whisper to betray it. Rising and falling tides force water through the narrowest of interstices, summoning rivers that carve the seafloor away and cease to exist the next hour.

The moon's gravitational pull tugs at the hips of the earth, collecting planetary bulges of oceanwater on near and far sides. This oceanic axis aligns with the moon as the earth spins, pulling the high tide across the planet's surface and creating a low tide in the trough of the gathering. And thus, the cold ocean swells of the Pacific rush down the Strait of Juan de Fuca, turning left towards Canada and right at Port Angeles. The lopsided high waters gather twice for each spin on the earth's axis; a mixed diurnal tide laps twice at the shins of the land.

The affectionate colloquial name for these waters is a murmur—The Sound. Onomatopoeia for the constant hum of a planet awash with magnetic fields, axial tilt, gravitational pull, magma convection currents, brittle plate fractures. Scientists listened with giant stethoscopes at the bottom of the Indian Ocean to a whir emitted at a frequency 10,000 times lower than human detection. Salish Sea, too, when said aloud, approximates the secrets disclosed by ebb and flood.

A small child throws leaves into a creek and rushes to the other side of the bridge, hands striking railing, to watch their wakes and tremors. By the Turn Point lighthouse, the streamlined form of



kayaks trace the gurgling line where the current meets its sibling. A conversation between currents goes like this: A nod, and one hangs suspended in the other. One is dark with silt from the bay and the mountain; the other is rich with salt and muscle memory of ocean swells. In places like this the sea gains unlikely topography. Eddies hang open—chasms to vast depths. Standing waves form impossible mountain ranges. Through the leaves slip, and only as the last kayak passes does the rush and hum of this line shift, a whine voiced in bubbles from each upwelling. In an instant and with murmured assent, the border gives up its conflict.



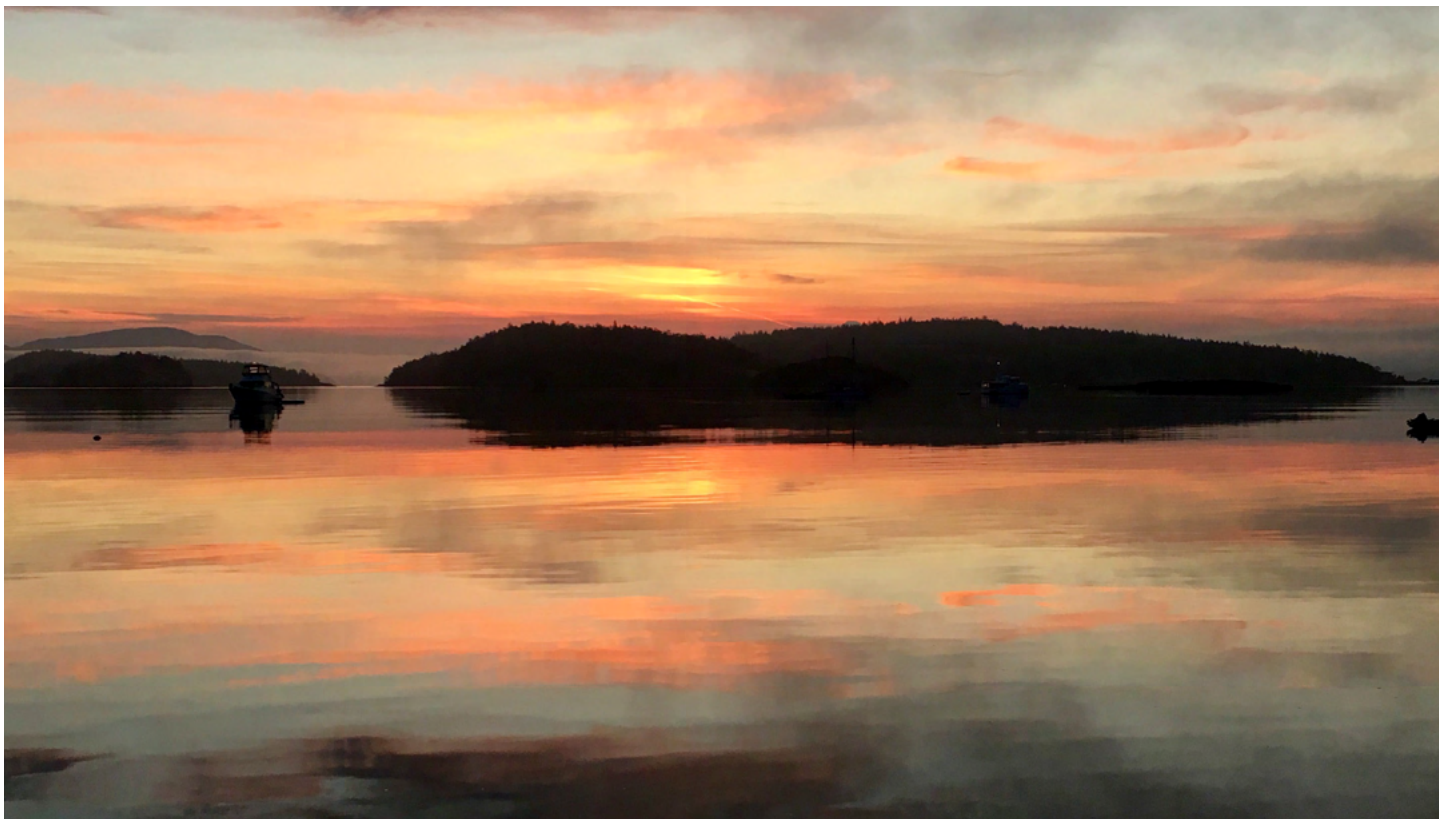
Traditional Land of the Lummi, Tulalip, and Samish People

II

The sailing vessel Abelina is a patchwork boat, making her really a fair-weather apparatus (most boats prefer to be). Thirty-six feet in length, she draws a six-foot draft and cuts a jolly line through most waters. Her bilge pump sometimes hammers at random, worrying at least one occupant enough to pry up the wooden flooring to check for water (usually none; sometimes a little). Her depth sounder, recording the water's depth directly underneath, was installed long ago by a rather uncommunicative fellow. Thus, no one knows whether "six feet" indicates six feet of water under the rudder or

six feet of water total. The ship's GPS long ago gave up the ghost, and the Radar sometimes records the position of the very same ghost in phantom blips. Weathered to its rubber soul, a frayed orange bungee cord secures an upside-down Tupperware container to the hole in the cabin ceiling where an air vent once lived, since tripped over and torn off.

There are places inland where water is the realm of canals and cement divorces the moon from its system. Joan Didion writes, in "Holy Water," of the West: "It is easy to forget that the only natural force over which we have any control out here is



water, and that only recently.” But at the river deltas of the coast, the grip of multitudinous state agencies slacken. Here, the water is of the air again.

As SV *Abelina* parallels glacial striations of the San Juans, the metal railings bead tear-tracks from the air. By 3pm, the sky begins to cohere to itself. It sticks to the water. Ten feet out from the boat the border between states of matter ceases to hold significance. “Soup” is the preferred metaphor for fog, but it is also an inept one. *Abelina* is a spider trapped by overturned porcelain bowl. The little boat bobs, and somewhere out there the land points and slides past.

The ocean in the air thickens. Hearing becomes the most reliable tool of proprioception. Someone switches off channel 16, the maritime distress channel. *Abelina* sheds the fuzz of radio voices in a soft wake. Listen. The atlas of troubling sounds is this: Ferries hum; freighters churn; motorboats slap at the water when hydroplaning or put-put if they sit lower; a bell marks a reef, rock, or either side of a shipping channel; waves crash on rock points and fzzz on gravel beaches. Sound carries across water—sometimes bringing conversations from other boats

before any other sense. *Abelina* is a willow leaf in the fog and the islands watch on, sure and shrouded.

III

There are moments when the water gives up its stories more readily. This fog is one of them. The tides of the Sound are so drastic, the island scattering so dense, that currents conceal one another indefinitely. And yet there are places, changing by the hour, where these coincidences gather floating trees, debris, and kelp, held together by the whirl on their every side. Porpoises, seals, and orcas gather to feed in the nutrient-rich areas of disturbance.

So, too, with the tales told by and of seas. They sometimes settle in places. The air gathers into a fog that is complete. An elephant seal surfaces, and in its slick and smell every sea monster can be understood as absolute human truth without hyperbole or metaphor. The elephant seal is giant, and startling, and right there. It has nothing at all to do with this patchwork boat—they derive from different worlds. But we inhabit a seeping planet, slip through shared and storied water.