



Photo by Kris Rose



Photo by Marisa McGuire

The Maritime *(Poetry)* Memorial

April is National Poetry Month — what better time to visit the Maritime Memorial in Astoria and read some of the magnificent poems etched into the wall

Story by MATT LOVE

Under the south end of the Megler Bridge at the very edge of the Columbia River stands the most magnificent ongoing and unwitting monument to poetry of the sea carved in granite in the Pacific Northwest and quite possibly all of North and South America.

Astoria's Uniontown Association erected this literary monument in 1993 and the adjacent Holiday Inn helps maintain it free of cost. Yes, a Holiday Inn nurtures poetry. This is Astoria after all, where such strange noble things are possible, indeed expected.

The monument's poems are microscopically short — one line, a maximum of 23 characters — but a great poet can do a lot with a microscope for a pen, especially when the poet isn't even a poet, but someone who wants to immortalize a loved one's limitless passion for the sea. This is, of course, a contradiction, because that loved one has a limited time on earth as a human being. Perhaps the tenor of that contradiction is where all the best poetry of the sea comes from — or should.

Did I mention that the monument also doubles as Astoria's Maritime Memorial, one of the grandest sublime places to visit in Astoria, and that the aforementioned 23-character poems are actually inscriptions in granite, written by a surviving loved one, which tersely and quintessentially describe a deceased local's intimate connection to the sea?

Here are my favorites, and I've included the names and dates because they comprise part of the poem. They tell a story of this town and the river and the sea, and the writing is clipped but paradoxically, wonderfully expansive, too.

Myrtle M. Fletcher 1911 – 1999 Wide as the Sea Was Her Love
Paul Hummasti 1908 – 1965 Draw up Thy Net
Gilbert Pitkanen 1921 – 1999 Gillnetter & Gentleman
Mollie A. Thompson 1901 – 1999 Bumble Bee Line Lady
Big John Viuhkola 1939 – 1985 The Sea He Loved Claimed Him
Nelda Ruth Parrish 1927 – 1997 Still Sailing in Spirit
Parris Lee Albertson 1951 – 1997 Cannery Worker Loved by All
John Raymond Jensen 1897 – 1960 Fisherman Lost at Sea
Shaun D. Roggensee 1976 – 1994 Kept by the Columbia
Charlotte Ann Wall 1931 – 1996 Deck Hand for Her Dad
Ragnvald J. Kraft 1904 – 1994 Sailed the Sea at 14
Josephine Elliott 1880 – 1983 Canoe Woman - Full of Grace
Kenny Paavola 1938 – 2005 Caught 'Em Cooked 'Em Canned 'Em
Nora Burkett 1915 – 1998 Don't Call Me for Crab
Elmer J. Hawkins 1913 – 2003 Now All Fish Are Keepers
Grant 'Rob' Leigh 1946 – 2010 River, Take Me Home
Earl J. Beyers 1911 – 2002 Dad You Are My True North
Lucille A. Berger 1916 – 2014 Her Love Was Our Harbor

The Maritime Memorial so intrigued me as a monument to poetry that I wanted my English Credit Recovery students at Astoria High School to experience it, and perhaps discover some literary inspiration just in time for April's National Poetry Month.

Thus, on a recent Thursday morning, we took a 90-minute field trip to the Memorial where I ran them through some brisk writing exercises under overcast skies that asked them to identify their favorite names and 23-character poems on the wall. It was all pretty free form, spontaneous and meandering, and that's exactly the way I wanted it — kind of like floating down a wide river ebbing and flowing to the sea.

Some students connected to the process better than others, but none of them failed to recognize the poignant storytelling virtues of the Memorial. Several students wrote from such unique personal perspectives that I thought I'd share a few pieces with readers.

As I mentioned earlier, April is National Poetry Month. What better time to visit the Maritime Memorial and read some of the magnificent poems etched into the wall. You might even be moved to write one yourself.

Matt Love lives in Astoria and is the author/editor of 13 books about Oregon, including "A Nice Piece of Astoria: A Narrative Guide." They are available at coastal bookstores and through www.nestuccaspitpress.com



Photo by Moritz Gaugg

Safe in Calm Waters

By MIKKO JAAKOLA

I was standing there, facing a wall of death by the sea, wondering what the last thing they said was, wondering if they are "safe in calm waters."

Max Thomson was one of the names that really stood out to me. Max was my dad's best friend all through high school and most of his life: 1973-2001. I was born in 1997, and Raija my sister was born in 2000, so that means he had met us before.

Another name that almost made me tear up was Jason "Jay" Bjaranson. He was a very close family friend that died a few years ago, and I remember my mom called me on the phone crying, trying to get words out telling me he passed.

Doc Haugland, another name on the wall, is my grandpa's brother. I remember the night he died. My grandpa and I walked down by the river, and he was telling stories of them growing up. The water was very calm and we could see the fog from the lights of the ships, and then my grandpa said, "safe in calm waters."



Photo by Tayla Fick

THE PHOTOS

The photographs accompanying this article are courtesy of Astoria High School's digital photography class, taught by Mickey Cereghino. Mickey instructed his students to read the pieces written by my students and then interpret them through photography on their own field trip to the Memorial. Mickey and I weren't sure what would result with this collaboration. We'll let the images speak for themselves. — Matt Love



Photo by Nicole Steele

Maritime Memorial

By CHRISTOPHER PAGE

The Light, It falters from vision, hides from sight
My path is lost, my way back home is gone
The Sea roars in a rage, spitting its wrath at me
The net I cast returns to me, shredded and ripped
on the rocks
Far above the stars cower in fear behind the inky,
black clouds
"Home." I left in such a rush
"Home." Did anyone know where I would be?
"Home." My family.....
My boat merely a speck in the mighty ocean
The sea tosses my vessel side to side, much like a
cat with a toy
My heart pounds, sounding more akin to thunder
I see not where I go, nor where I came from, lost
in this tempest
Then as I say my final prayers, I feel a hand and
my body steadies.
A voice whispers, "Fare forward voyager."



Photo by Erik White