

CLOSE TO HOME

# WATER AND THE SOUL

By DAVID CAMPICHE  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

In a churning fury, ocean waves race to shore, swollen into spume, into white-crowned foam, into blankets of sea spray. These currents can crush a fishing boat, or even a mighty steel-hulled ship. Storm waves will rip up a headland or erode beaches in nibbles or huge mouthfuls like a powerful untamed beast, sometimes in a matter of hours.

Even on a bluebird day, water can drown a man without the slightest effort. Some might think of this power as indifferent, petulant or uncaring, or simply a force onto itself. A force to be reckoned with. One might imagine water as the power of God. Indeed, the Greeks gave that God a name: Poseidon, and prayed for deliverance from its bad moods.

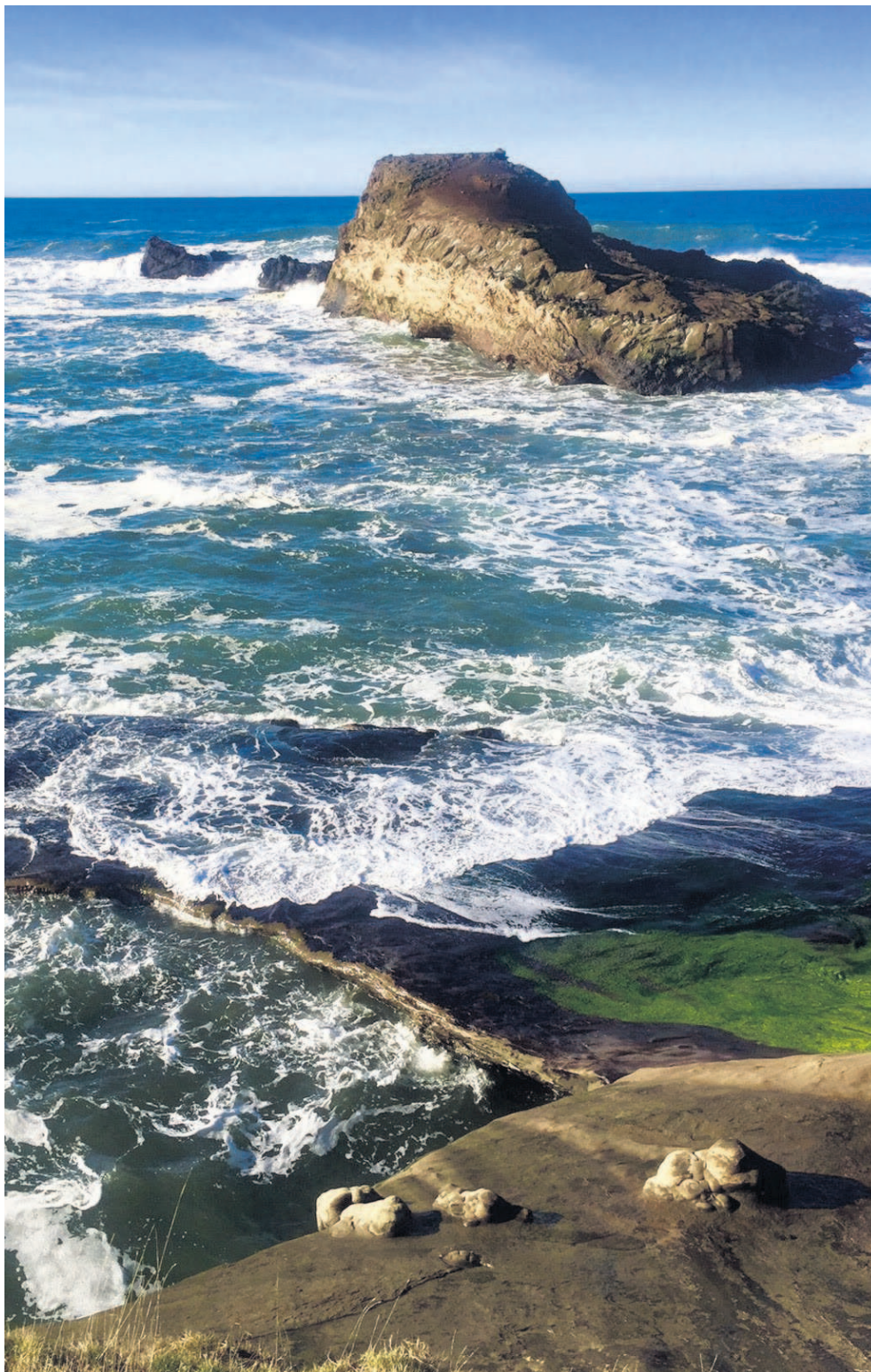
## Observing water

I stand on the edge of land, and for hours contemplate the sound and fury of the liquid force before me. It's February, though the weather has turned mild as a bowl of milk.

But miles at sea, the storm of yesterday still brews up combers that race westerly like a cavalry charge toward a landmass we call home, the Oregon Coast.

Leonardo da Vinci spent a lifetime studying the movement of water, the cataclysm of currents and eddies, and all that was shaped and altered by flood in his 15th century seascape. At times, he wished to control it, to harness the force of falling and surging water — of uncontrolled violence, as he noted, when floods overrode the riverbanks that laced his beloved Italy:

*The ancients called man a lesser world, and certainly the use of this name is well bestowed, because his body is an analog for world. As man has in him bones that support his flesh, the world has its rocks that support the earth. As man has a pool of blood in which the lungs rise and fall in breathing, so the body of the earth has its ocean tide which likewise rises and falls every six hours, as if the world breathed. As the blood veins originate in that pool and spread all over the human body, so likewise the ocean sea fills the body of the earth*



The Oregon Coast on a calm winter morning

*with infinite springs of water.*

Long before the Italian Renaissance, Lao Tsu weighed in:

*The highest good is like water. / Water gives life to the ten thousand things and does not strive. / It flows in places men reject and so is like the Tao.*

Let it be said, these geniuses were not

alone in their observations, only ahead of their time. Ask your friend the fisherman. He knows storm. Ask a pastor or priest about how and when Jesus calmed the waters and walked upon the Sea of Galilee. What might we say about the force of spirituality versus the power of the sea? Ask mariners: Where does the love of God go,

when an unexpected storm tosses 50-ton ships to and fro like so much flotsam?

Growing up on the Long Beach Peninsula in the 1950s, many of my schoolmates were fatherless, the victims of the raging storms of the Pacific Ocean. Safety standards were minimal. GPS was not yet a dream, certainly not a reality. Sailing depended more on intuitive skill, experience, as well as luck or fate. The Coast Guard was frequently outmatched, as on the night when four Coast Guard vessels (two of which were 54 feet long and deemed unsinkable) and one crab boat were overcome by 40-foot seas. In that same decade, several ships sank or were forced aground, total losses.

## Sea vistas

And now I stand at the edge of this great unpredictable Pacific Ocean and meditate on a lovely seascape — meditate on crowns of silver and the pure white mountains of spume, on the translucent and emerald-blue underbelly of the rushing combers, or the flush of metallic colors, flashing like a hummingbird named Tinker Bell darting through thick salty air.

Below me are a scattering of water-worn boulders, appearing somehow like Humpty Dumpty on the wall, many still attached to terra firma but reshaped by eons — by tide and currents and storm.

My wife, Laurie, and I spent three days on the Oregon Coast, parked mostly in Depoe Bay. We walked and talked and confided, ate local seafood and held hands while moving like a younger couple, awe-struck by some latter-day form of infatuation. Love, of course, is often shaped like beaches at the edge of the tide. Did those waves shape us? What magic or spell did the sea press upon our dreams or aspirations? And just as important: How do they impact you?

I offer this: Get into your car and head south. Trade one paradise (our Columbia-Pacific homeland) for another (the south Oregon Coast), just a couple of hours south of Astoria. From sublime to sublime. From ferocious to wild. Foggy, misty or rain-saturated — choose for yourself, or simply take a chance. For a few days, become a beachcombing vagabond.

Or travel to the edge of the known world. Pretend you are launching a wooden dory named “Looks Far” with a painted Haida eye on the prow. Drift far under the starry night illuminated by a full moon and brilliant white caps. Drift with the currents of your imagination, each dream surging like the mighty ocean under the hull of your cedar vessel.

Be free as the water. 

DAVID CAMPICHE PHOTO