

BROADWATER

Michael Brendan O'Hara  
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY **MICHAEL O'HARA** ENTITLED **BROADWATER** BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING, IN PART, REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ART NEW MEDIA AND PHOTOJOURNALISM.

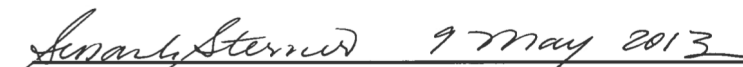
Graduate Thesis Committee:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Student)

Michael O'Hara  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name of Student)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Advisor)

Gabriela Bulisova and Susan L. Sterner  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name of Advisor)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Department Chair)

Susan L. Sterner  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name of Department Chair)

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## **Abstract**

This photo documentary project focuses on Deale, Maryland, a village with an active charter boat fleet on the Western Shore of Chesapeake Bay. It is an exploration of past and present, with the photographer returning to the place of his childhood to capture images that were fading from memory. From September 2012 until March 2013 the author travelled Deale's bayside roads, creek side communities, docks, and boatyards in search of people and places left behind 15 years earlier. Some people and places were familiar; others no longer exist. The photographer also spent time aboard the charter boat *Miss Grace*, departing Rockhold Creek with fishing parties in search of rockfish, the prized and celebratory catch of the Deale charter fleet. The project includes a website and a book. It is a blend of personal memory and a contemporary vision of a place that persists even as the world passes it by.

## **Introduction**

We all look at images of our childhood and try to remember those times, wondering if we really remember that moment or only the photograph. Many photographs from my childhood in Deale, Maryland, were rich in varied ways, and different from those of others my age. Alongside the soccer, Little League, and birthday party photos are images of me helping my father letter a wooden workboat, standing alone on the bow of a boat in dry dock, pulling my "boat trailer" out of the culvert on my bicycle, holding the lure that caught the rockfish, pulling in the eel trap on my 80-year-old neighbor's pier.

In trying to choose a topic for my thesis, my first thought was to focus on the life of charter boat captains in Deale. They are an interesting and somewhat eccentric clan. They live a life that seems idyllic but is much harsher and challenging than it appears. I spent a good bit of time in their presence growing up—they seemed a distant but familiar possibility. I could photograph Deale on dry land easily enough, but I needed access to the Bay and a charter boat seemed the best route. After much reaching out to the Deale charter captains, and repeated failures to connect with a willing partner, I was able to make arrangements with Captains Bob Baker and Karl Bieberich of the *Miss Grace* who, befitting the name of their vessel, allowed me to join their fishing parties over the course of many weekends during the fall 2012 rockfish season.

From September 2012 until March 2013 when boats were in dry dock, I spent nearly every weekend either going out on the *Miss Grace* or driving and walking the roads of Deale, finding images that were meaningful to me as I tried to recollect my childhood in this now fading and distant place. On some visits, I took no photos at all. The result of this journey is a photo documentary of sorts, in part memoir, in part paean. In addition to placing my work on a website ([www.broadwaterbook.com](http://www.broadwaterbook.com)), I chose to print a book to create a dedicated space for the sequence of images, something that does not translate well on a website. Plus, a book was a tangible thing I could give back to the Deale community, and especially those who gave me access to their world.

### **Project Rationale**

I spent the first 10 years of my living on Broadwater Creek, in Deale Maryland where my father was a sign maker and sometimes first mate for captains in the Deale

charter boat fleet. Later, we moved further south in Maryland to the Patuxent River side of the Calvert County peninsula. I went to undergraduate school on the St. Mary's River in St. Mary's County, Maryland. I have always lived on or near the waters of Chesapeake Bay. A special part of Southern Maryland is the centrality of Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries—it is composed of a series of peninsulas bracketed by the Bay, the Patuxent River, the Potomac River, and smaller bodies of water. Unlike Annapolis, which focuses on sailboats and pleasure boats, Southern Maryland's connections with the Bay are its workboats—crabbers, oysterman, charters. The people who operate these boats can be eccentric, gruff, ambitious, down-to-earth, or even crazy. They were my neighbors and a big part of my young life, as I spent time making rounds with my father as he lettered their boats.

Fifteen year have passed since I wiled away afternoons in the boat yards, entertaining myself by climbing on boats and stacking oyster shells, watching old men moving slowly on board their boats. For this reason, I chose a charter boat as my vehicle for exploration. It was the only way I could get out on the water, to again see the world that begins when the engine starts and you push away from land.

Coming back so many years later with the goal of documenting this place and these people challenged me. This was an exercise in memory. Would this place be as I remembered it? With so many of the characters of my youth now gone, would I feel as welcome as I did back then? I may not always be near these places, so this was one last intense visit. In some ways this project turned into a melancholy journey because I realized that although this place would always be a part of me, I was no longer a part of

it. I will continue to visit my aging neighbors until they are gone, and then I will truly feel the memories fading.

### **Summary of Research**

Between September 2012 and March 2013 I returned to and explored the fishing community of Deale, Maryland, on the Western Shore of Chesapeake Bay. I spent my early childhood there and returned to capture my memories of that time from a more mature perspective. Thus, many of the same sights and people were still in place; this is not a community that changes over time. What was most notable were the people who were gone—the old characters of my youth who had died in the 15 years since I left. This made it hard to connect in ways I thought I might have been able to—the people who knew me or remembered my parents were disappearing.

Fortunately, I was able to experience the lifeblood of this community, which is its charter boat fleet, aboard the *Miss Grace*. Few of the charter boat captains that were working when I was a child were still operating out of Deale. Many had died; others had retired. I contacted the President of the Deale Captains Association, a loose knit group of 20 or more captains, to explain my project. One captain, Bob Baker, stepped forward, remembering my father and his lettering work on *Miss Grace* and other boats. He is in the process of selling his boat to a younger captain, Karl Bieberich, and they were willing to let me go out on fishing parties for which there was room. It was understood that I was to stay out of the way and not interfere with the efforts to catch rockfish. The *Miss Grace*, licensed for 40 passengers, was built in Crisfield, Maryland. She is 48 feet long and has a

wide beam of 15 feet so it was a comfortable place for me to shoot and stay out of the way.

Captains Baker and Bieberich gave me important access to their livelihood—a critical perspective for understanding Deale. Thus, in addition to wandering around Deale and its backwaters, I was able to go out on the Bay in search of rockfish, or striped bass, and witness the hunt that people pay to experience. Through Captains Baker and Bieberich I encountered the small, autonomous, and highly independent group of businessmen operating out of a town whose livelihood depends on the viability of recreational fishing.

Charter captains form a tightknit, but competitive community in Deale, jockeying for position on the open water, seeking an edge in the annual search for rockfish and bluefish each fall. The fleet faces perpetual challenges posed by weather, the economy, and ecological and environmental factors—all of which affect the success of a season. The captains have an odd relationship with their clients. They need them, because that's who pays the bills, but you can tell they would rather be out on the water without them. Clients often come from Washington, D.C. , or Northern, Virginia, drink too much, make too much noise, and don't understand the language of the weather, the birds, and the Bay itself. The captains, always professional, frequently silently tolerate less than ideal passengers. Recognizing this dynamic, and out of respect for my hosts and their need to run a business, I reserved my shooting for images that they would find acceptable and shared my images with them later, should they want any for themselves.

The concept of a charter boat community was simple when I first started the project: they dock together so they must be friends. I thought that I had some attachment



to this place because I grew up there, but I was wrong. This may be a failure in achieving the “editorial dream”, but the more photography I look at the more I celebrate this failure because it represents the truth of my project. Good journalism is reliant on an honest time commitment and an individual with a specific ideology. I frequently drove around taking no photographs at all. A lot of my photos don’t have anyone in them. They are individual objects or moments that are my own. This project is a combination of memory and a new vision of a place that is unique and fading, not only in my memory but also in its own place in history. There is a new Deale there, and it resembles the old Deale, but it’s shinier and different.

What was unchanged was the culture of the charter boat captains. These men are self-employed and have their own boats because they don’t want a community. I tried my best to respect their autonomy and their need for distance. To push any closer would be bending the truth and forcing them into a place they did not want to be

### **Precedence and Goals**

There are few photographers who have extensively documented the working side of Chesapeake Bay. The most directly relevant is A. Aubrey Bodine, (1906-1970) pictorialist/photographer for the *Baltimore Sun* for 43 years, from 1927 to 1970. Although some of his work is better described as pictorialism than photojournalism, his images are iconic in evoking sense of place. Critics describe his work as “painterly,” which I don’t necessarily consider pejorative. Bodine was an innovator and a force among artistic photographers and he has been credited with enlarging the dimensions of newspaper photography. His doctrine stressed an alliance

between art and nature, and man within nature. Often criticized as being the first “Photoshopper” Bodine struggled to find a place between photography and photojournalism.

Another Bay photographer was Marion Warren. Warren was Maryland’s official photographer for 14 years, and his work can be found in books, a television documentary and exhibitions. His most famous photo, a 1953 shot of a moonrise over the newly constructed Chesapeake Bay Bridge is iconic but does not do justice to his collection of 7,000 black and white images. Warren’s view of the photograph: “Capturing life is the most vital thing photography can do. Documenting the real life of people, their real existence -- no other art can do it.” (Schudel, 2006)

Because the focus of my work was not so much as on the Bay as on its inhabitants and landscape, I was more influenced by the work of William Eggleston, Alec Soth, Christine Patterson, and Chloe Dewe Mathews in their portrayal of subjects and subject matter.

These artists also influenced my choices for my website design, [www.broadwaterbook.com](http://www.broadwaterbook.com). For the website, I wanted a simple, clean, artist’s website that did not deviate too much from a book experience or distract from what was within the frames. The left-to-right scroll seemed to be the best way to highlight and preserve the image sequencing.

As mentioned previously, I chose to print a book to create a dedicated space for the sequence of images, something that does not translate well on a website. Since my final product is a book, I plan on giving it to those who have helped me during the process of photographing my thesis. Most who will receive the book do not know (and

never seemed to want to know) the scope of the project; they only know that they are a part of it. In fact, many seemed intentionally disinterested in the purpose of the project—a reaction I never found offensive but true to the character of Deale. Others have seen a small selection of images that I think that they might like. My aim in sharing so few photographs is not to deceive them but rather to simplify our exchange. If they are not all that interested in photographs of themselves they certainly are not likely to be interested in the photography that I enjoy and want to make. I recognize that this sets off a series of cultural anthropological red flags, but it is true to my beliefs and, I believe acceptable in their world. I want to give people what I think they will like.

I see two separate versions of the book. One will be accessible and will be given to those who helped me the most and one will have my personal edit. I am familiar with the concept of two edits from doing freelance work and photography and editing for a college newspaper. However, I have never gone so far as to print two book dummies, so I anticipate learning a thing or two when I put the two side-by-side. Who knows, maybe I will throw away the “accessible” one. Nevertheless, I see community engagement as another form of paying it forward. You clean up for the next journalist to arrive. Hopefully a book will address the small mark I made.

## **Conclusion**

This project was important for many reasons. It forced me to conduct an extended examination of a subject that was both familiar enough to seem safe but distant enough to be disconcerting. My expectations and goals evolved over the course of the project until I settled into a willingness to combine memory and images in a way that would be

compelling enough to others but also true to my own beliefs and standards. I can only ever truly know whether I fulfilled one of those goals.

## **Broadwater Narrative**

We were not sailors. My father owned two small boats he used for fishing or to take us into the middle of the Bay to swim. He served as a first mate and sign maker for several members of the Deale charter boat fleet. Our house on Broadwater Creek was built to capture the light off the water. The surrounding marshes and creeks were pungent. They say when you first start to write you should write about what you know. Even though I have been taking photographs for a while, this was my first extended project. I wanted to shoot what I know but have never captured except in my memory. These seemingly disparate images may only be a curiosity to those who are not familiar with these places. To me, they are personal.

As a child, I spent hours in boatyards amusing myself while my father lettered boats. Doyle Kendall, Captain of the “Bonnie Bette” and nicknamed “Popeye,” was our neighbor. He was nearly 80 when we moved there and still operated his wooden charter boat with a flask in his pocket. He is now gone. Our other neighbor, now in her mid-80s, was the daughter of a “bugeye” captain whose ship would dock in front of the house she had lived in since she was born—the house next door to us that was built from debris that floated down into the Bay after the Johnstown Flood.

With my only living grandparents far north in Pennsylvania, these old and crusty characters were like my adopted grandparents, part of what I only now realize was a disappearing culture. Their wooden boats are being replaced by a new generation of captains and fiberglass boats who, like them, want to try to make a living off the Bay; an increasingly difficult prospect given the Bay’s health, the dwindling populations of fish and shellfish, the high price of fuel, and the economy.

Captains Baker and Bieberich of the *Miss Grace* gave me important access to their livelihood—a critical perspective for understanding Deale. Thus, in addition to wandering around Deale and its backwaters, I was able to go out on the Bay in search of rockfish, or striped bass, and witness the hunt that people pay to experience. Although the world around it has changed, there is still something familiar to me about the Bay—its light, its colors and changing moods, its smells at low and high tides, the quiet when the motor gets cut or you are just trawling. Working a charter boat is not easy work, and it's not glamorous. Yet I sense these captains would not choose any other profession and I can relate to that.

Coming back so many years later with the goal of documenting this place and these people challenged me. This was an exercise in memory. Would it be as I remembered it? With so many of the characters of my childhood now gone, would I feel as welcome as I did back then? I may not always be near these places, so this was one last intense visit. In some ways this project turned into a melancholy journey because I realized that although this place would always be a part of me, I was no longer a part of it. I will continue to visit my aging friends until they are gone, and then I will truly feel the memories fading.

## Appendices

1. Nelson Bryant, "Outdoors; Bay's Striped Bass Stage a Comeback," *The New York Times*, August 27, 1989, accessed September 9, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/27/sports/outdoors-bay-s-striped-bass-stage-a-comeback.html>.

The mid 1980s were hard times for the Chesapeake charter industry. Overfishing and pollution of the rockfish population resulted in outright bans that lasted for a few years, running some captains out of business. The ban worked, and the population came back, as did some of the fishing industry, as reported in this 1989 article.

2. Cameron, David, and David Fahrenthold. *Chesapeake: The Aerial Photography of Cameron Davidson*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Davidson is an aerial and location portrait photographer. He works on assignment for several print publications, such as *Vanity Fair*, *National Geographic*, and *Smithsonian*. This coffee table book records Cameron's project to capture Chesapeake Bay from its headwaters to its mouth to the ocean. Although I am not totally engaged by his style, this collection's greatest asset is its perspective, which is one most of us cannot afford or access. The book has a clear environmental spin in its depiction, most likely influenced by Cameron's co-author Fahrenthold, who covers environmental issues for a variety of publications.

3. Eggleston, William, and Thomas Weski. *William Eggleston: Chromes*. Gottingen: Steidl, 2011.

William Eggleston's work, specifically his use of color, has intrigued me. His quiet, meandering documentation of structure amongst nature may be applicable to my thesis. The docks, the buoys, the tools, and the boats are all of equal interest to me as the act of fishing and the characters that partake in it. Places, present or from that past, occupied or unoccupied, that fisherman have created that facilitate the act of fishing.

4. Ewing, Kathleen M.H. *A. Aubrey Bodine, Baltimore Pictorialist, 1906-1970*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.

This is a retrospective book on the photography of Bodine, who was a pictorialist/photographer for the *Baltimore Sun* for 43 years, from 1927 to 1970. His pictures of Maryland, in particular the Baltimore Harbor and Chesapeake Bay, were centerpieces of the Sunday edition. He became an innovator and a force among artistic photographers and enlarged the dimensions of newspaper photography. His doctrine stressed an alliance between art and nature, and man within nature. Often criticized as being the first "photoshopper" Bodine struggled to find a place between photography and photojournalism.

5. Warren, Marion, and Mame Marion. *Bringing Back the Bay: The Chesapeake in the Photographs of Marion Warren and the Voices of Its People*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

6. Schudel, M. "Photographer Marion Warren; Chronicled Life in Maryland." *Washington Post*, September 13, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/12/AR2006091201510.html>.

Warren was Maryland's official photographer for 14 years, and his work can be found in books, a television documentary and exhibitions. His most famous photo, a 1953 shot of a moonrise over the newly constructed Chesapeake Bay Bridge is iconic. Late in his career, he embarked on a decade-long project to document the life of the Chesapeake, collecting hundreds of photographs in this book. Even into his 80s, Warren continued to print his photographs in his darkroom, while learning new digital printing processes. Warren's view of the photograph: "Capturing life is the most vital thing photography can do. Documenting the real life of people, their real existence -- no other art can do it" (as cited in Schudel, M., 2006).

7. Chloe Dewe Matthews "Aral: A Damned Sea," accessed September 17, 2012, <http://www.chloedewemathews.com/>.

This collection loosely documents the lives of individuals that try to fish the Aral Sea, or what is left of it. As a mixture of classic photojournalism and contemporary documentary style, the series informs the balance I'd like to achieve in documenting the main activity of my thesis: fishing. Her edit is conservative and concise, though still maintains a cinematic quality.

8. Danielle O'Steen, "Colby Caldwell Fuses Traditional and Digital with His Art," *The Washington Post*, March 30, 2012, accessed September 22, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/colby-caldwell-fuses-traditional-and-digital-with-his-art/2012/03/29/gIQA7XqfIS\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/colby-caldwell-fuses-traditional-and-digital-with-his-art/2012/03/29/gIQA7XqfIS_story.html).

Caldwell, a photography professor at St. Mary's College of Maryland, has a show at the Hemphill Gallery in Washington, D.C., of his series of images depicting "spent" scenes from the Southern Maryland hunting life. O'Steen writes, "Caldwell's subject matter, as it turns out, is only the vehicle for his greater dialogue with the history of his medium. He questions what fits into the definition of photography. Does a scanned object count? Must photographers use a camera? Must prints offer a certain truth, in the spirit of a documentary?" This series includes, among other images, shotgun shell casings of varying ages and in varying states of decay found on his farm in St. Mary's County, Maryland. Caldwell scanned the shells at high resolution and placed them against white background. In his view, he has captured "refuse" in the domain of photography to reflect a memory and the passage of time. I appreciate Caldwell's persistence in his narrative.

9. Patterson, Christian. *Redheaded Peckerwood*. London: Mack, 2011.



This is the first published photo book by Patterson. Redhead Peckerwood follows the path that two teenagers took after committing a murder. Scanned notes, pamphlets, and still life photography of “evidence” create an investigative scenario for the viewer. A past narrative is created, and the outcome be inferred from the images when viewed in a linear fashion. I am intrigued by the conceptual framework and positioning and chronology of the images.

10. Candace Thompson, “Striped Bass Season Ends with a Whimper, *The Baltimore Sun*, February 8, 2011, accessed September 23, 2012, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-02-28/sports/bs-sp-rockfish-season0301-20110228\\_1\\_illegal-nets-striped-bass-patrol-boats](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-02-28/sports/bs-sp-rockfish-season0301-20110228_1_illegal-nets-striped-bass-patrol-boats).

The article chronicles the 2010-2011 rockfish (striped bass) season that was plagued first by poachers who depleted the allowed harvest, and then bad weather that forced charter boats to shore. One bad season can wipe out a charter boat business. Captains are perennially at the mercy of factors beyond their control, the weather, polluters, the economy, and bad actors.

11. Christie Smythe and Tiffany Kary, “NY Judge Throws Out State Fracking Lawsuit,” *Bloomberg News/Tulsa World*, September 25, 2012, accessed September 25, 2012, [http://www.tulsaworld.com/business/article.aspx?subjectid=49&articleid=20120925\\_49\\_E4\\_CUTLIN841657](http://www.tulsaworld.com/business/article.aspx?subjectid=49&articleid=20120925_49_E4_CUTLIN841657).

Fracking might seem like a foreign problem to the Chesapeake charter industry but events as far away as New York State can affect the Bay’s health, which is the largest estuary in the United States with an enormous watershed that sucks up pollutants from the entire Mid Atlantic and Northeastern region. The charter industry watches these decisions from afar and was waiting for word on this ruling, which just arrived.

12. Chris Metzler, Director, *Plagues and Pleasures on the Salton Sea*, Documentary, 2004.

This documentary chronicles the history and fate of the Salton Sea, once known as the Riviera of the West. The Sea was created by accident and eventually became one of the country’s worst ecological disasters. The Sea’s shores are populated by eccentrics and hangers on, making this documentary both visually surreal and strange. The light of the dead Sea and the California skies are particularly noteworthy against the backdrop of despair and eccentricity.