UNH PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICES (ALL)

Turning to Earth: Stories of Ecological Conversion
By F. Marina Schauffler ’98G
University of Virginia Press, 2003

Marina Schauffler is deeply concerned about the ways in which we use and abuse our planet. She believes that there are more effective measures, beyond recycling and reducing lawn chemicals, to stem environmental degradation, steps that involve a sea change in the way we perceive the Earth and our place on it. Humans need to turn their attention inward, she argues, to accomplish any real environmental change, and after reading her book, you will think so, too.

From the beginning, literature about America and by Americans has in some way been about the land. We have a rich tradition of nature writing, from 19th-century transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, early 20th-century conservationists like John Muir and Aldo Leopold, and in the mid-20th century, politically charged texts of writers like Rachel Carson and Bill McKibben. Schauffler identifies a late-20th century subset of “ecological writers:” Carson, Edward Abbey, N. Scott Momaday, Scott Russell Sanders, Alice Walker and Terry Tempest Williams, who focus on what she terms “the dynamic interplay between inner and outer ecology.” These writers, Schauffler argues, have integrated a profound spiritual and philosophical sense about the Earth into their practical lives, and we have much to learn from them as a result.

Schauffler, whose graduate work included degrees in English and natural resources, argues that these six writers have all experienced some form of ecological awakening that changed the way they lived in relation to the land and the other creatures that inhabit it. Schauffler defines six phases of ecological conversion—remembrance, reflection, revelation, reciprocity, resistance and ritual—and describes how these patterns have transformed the writers’ lives. She includes parts of her own story of ecological conversion as well. “Viewing environmental reform in terms of conversion,” she asserts, “extends the parameters of contemporary environmental discussion. It highlights the spiritual and moral dimensions of change and the need for a wholehearted reassessment of how we live.”

This book, written with great intelligence and skill, integrates Earth-centered spirituality with literary criticism, and it will convince you that something has to happen in the human heart if environmental change is ever to occur.

Dead Men Tapping: The End of the Heather Lynne II
By Kate Morse Yeomans ’95
McGraw-Hill, 2004

Sebastian Junger’s enormously popular book, The Perfect Storm, created a niche in the marketplace for drama-at-sea stories when it was published in 1997, and now comes the story of the Heather Lynne II with much of the same suspense. Like The Perfect Storm, Dead Men Tapping reveals the culture of a northeastern fishing community—in this case, Newburyport, Mass.—and delves into its marine history, including the history of the Coast Guard, which was born in Newburyport. Unlike Junger, though, Yeomans is an insider whose personal history is entwined with the story of the Heather Lynne II.

On Sept. 5, 1996, the day before her wedding, Yeomans was awakened at dawn by a telephone call from her fiancé, Rob Yeomans, who was tuna fishing with his father, Bob Yeomans, three miles north of the tip of Cape Ann. Rob needed the telephone number of a...
marine salvor because the "Heather Lynne II", a friend’s gillnetter, had been run over by a tugboat and a 272-foot barge, and her three crew members were trapped. Rob, his father and other nearby fishermen who had rushed to the scene to help could hear the men shouting and tapping from inside the hull of the overturned boat.

The reader finds out much of the above in the epilogue to "Dead Men Tapping", because, as Yeomans acknowledges, this is her book, but it isn’t her story. The book begins in a Boston courtroom almost four years after the fact, where the fishermen’s families are accusing the United States Coast Guard of negligence. What follows is a careful but impassioned piecing together of what may have happened on that early September morning.

Yeomans, who holds a Coast Guard 100-ton captain’s license and owns and co-captains a 42-foot charter fishing boat, spent six years researching "Dead Men Tapping" and interviewed hundreds of people. She makes use of 2,363 pages of transcripts from the Coast Guard Board of Inquiry hearings, and 1,070 pages of trial testimony transcripts. And she logged more than 300 hours on towboats, trying to understand what happens when a mariner calls for help. The book is worth reading if only for her vast knowledge of how boats work and how fishermen think.

But boaters beware. This is also a cautionary tale about the perils of trusting that other boat operators are following the rules of the sea or that the Coast Guard will bail you out if you get into trouble. As one deckhand told the Associated Press on the day of the "Heather Lynne II"’s accident, “Any sense of security we had about being rescued—that kind of slipped away.”