

WHY EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY AND THE BIBLE?

In the early-1960's I was fortunate to continue a friendship with Arctic explorer Donald MacMillan and his wife Miriam. It all began when my father - then curator of Mystic Seaport - welcomed the schooner Bowdoin as a permanent exhibit at the museum. Being an Arctic history enthusiast, it was my joy to visit the MacMillans at their waterfront home in Provincetown. Mac and Miriam always enjoyed sharing their treasure trove of books and memorabilia from the Far North, including items from the Moravian mission at Nain. There along the Labrador coast the MacMillans had fostered and supported a school for Inuit children for years

During many visits with the MacMillan's , I met Kate Hettasch, who served as teacher and illustrator in her home at the Inuit School at Nain. We often discussed the years in which the 89 foot BOWDOIN delivered important supplies to many missions along the coast of Labrador, and supported the Moravian mission efforts there.

Two important friends of the MacMillans who were vital to their lives and friendship were Bert Bangs and Frank Henderson. Both maintained a salty use of sea language that I will always remember: {Example of Miriam's hesitation while completing a hand of "whist."} Bertie scolded her saying: Well now, Miriam, " its too bad you "didn't" gaff it after you hove to!"

During one visit with "Mac", I was anxious to learn more about the 1925 MacMillan expedition to Etah, North Greenland sponsored , in part, by the National Geographic Society and the U.S. Navy. The BOWDOIN, then only four years old, was accompanied by the motor vessel PEARY, which carried the first amphibious aircraft to fly across the Polar Sea from Etah North Greenland. The pilots recruited for the mission

included Richard Byrd, Floyd Bennett, and Berndt Balchan. Another important figure on the schooner, operating radio transmissions from Etah "WNP" - wireless North Pole -was Eugene McDonald, a founder and president of the Zenith Radio Corporation.

On August 1, While stopping at Battle Harbor, Labrador, MacMillan met an adventurous young crew --who with a Tancook style 32 foot schooner - planned to sail north along that rugged shore as far as the Sir Thomas Button Islands. And without the aid of a motor they ventured forth---and miraculously completed the cruise by early fall.

In the early 1960's, as a sailing master and teacher at Tabor Academy , I hoped to make a similar cruise to Labrador with a crew of students. Turning to Kate Hettasch and veteran cruising sailor Dr. Paul Sheldon, I asked them to recommend the best book describing a similar adventure. Together, they named NORTHERN LIGHTS written by adventurer who in 1925 sailed Labrador coast in a 32 foot Tancook schooner built in Nova Scotia. The book , written in 1929 is a classic!

Along with a vivid description of that forbidding coast, Holdridge spins a great tale about the experiences of a small craft sailor- At one point as the DOLPHIN was returning south, the crew found themselves in dire straits while riding out a gale in a storm tossed fiord. At a point of crisis, Holdridge unpacked a gift that “per instruction “was only to be opened at a time when all reading materials had been read by the owner and crew- and indeed, the circumstances were “Dire.” The carefully wrapped package was the gift of the builder of their little schooner and a close friend. When Holdridge opened the book , it contained a Bible. And now for the remainder of their cruise, Holdridge wrote:

“We read the Bible incessantly, not as a moral precept and parable, but as literature. We could find any kind of story we needed to suit our mood, There was the solemn, the gay, the risque’, the dramatic and grand, almost any thing our varied tastes could demand. Sometimes we read the tales, our faces serious and absorbed or our snickers audible above the scream of the gale in the rigging. It was a revelation to us that there should be such meat in a book which had come to bore us simply because it has been shoved down our throats when we were children. Our other mainstay was the Bowditch practical navigator.

Almost biblical – in one sense – the 32 foot schooner had been beset by an almost metaphorical gale, until the young skipper rowed ashore and climbed to the top of the fjord in order to view the scene looking out to sea beyond. To his amazement, the coastline as far as he could see, was perfectly calm. They had been victims of a mini-low pressure: all in a small segment of the coast!

Now, I must confess that my participation in EFM- Education for Ministry was not unlike that of young Desmond Holdridge-- and his shipmates. I did not know what to expect as we began our weekly discussions. Together, the class took on the assigned readings, discussed our perceptions, and came to understand many lessons of history and metaphor through various assigned chapters or thoughts of our own. It was - an should be - an adventure.

Perhaps the most daunting, yet instructive assignment was to compose our own “Spiritual autobiography” , which we were encouraged to share with the class. This was

done with openness and confidentiality as a guide. Overall, EFM serves as a threshold into the fun of learning.

Now, returning to my many visits with the MacMillans over the years , I remember Admiral Mac's constant questioning about the world around us, as he would often exclaim: “What can we learn today?” In the spirit of the the old explorer's query: will you join our EFM class for another adventurous voyage of faith and understanding? Think about it.