
Letters From New England

October 7, 2009

Cranberry Isles



View from the mail boat.

Cranberry Isles, Maine

As predicted, the weather was perfect for donning a sou'wester and heading out to sea – and so we did. Ann added an umbrella to her outfit; I chose Gortex all cap-ape. That way I could hold on to a cabin rail with one hand and grip my camera with the other. The captain looked a little uneasy with a rusticator bouncing around on the stern deck, but one look at the death grip I had on that rail assured him I wasn't going anywhere. And, unlike other memorable sails in choppy weather (Pat, are you there?) I suffered not a moment of mal de mer. Summers of kayaking in Somes Sound must have helped.

It rained solid sheets for the run among the Cranberry Isles; the round trip was less than two hours. We would have gone ashore had there been anything open - a restaurant, a museum, anything– but we were told that everything had closed for the season. And although Ann and I make an adventurous pair, walking around in that rain just didn't seem like it was going to be a lot of fun.



The rain was blowing so hard coming out of Northeast Harbor that there wasn't much visibility. The only way to keep the camera lens (almost) dry was to shoot over the stern – taking pictures of my own wake, so to speak. My thoughts soon turned inward, but only a couple of old sea dogs (not including Ann, of course) graced the interior of the cabin. With my back pressed firmly against the cabin bulkhead, I waited patiently for our next port of call.



Aha! Photo ops. I was relieved to discover that I wasn't the only one dressed head-to-toe in modern-day oilskins. I suppose that the fluorescent bulb he or she is carrying is a sure-fire way to deflect lightening strikes.



At Little Cranberry the entire nature of the voyage changed. Nineteen young souls came aboard bringing with them the carefree nature of a summer's day. The sound of the engine in the cabin was soon drowned out by a myriad of small but powerful voices all striving to be heard at once. They were accompanied by several mentors who had the look and command of teachers. And so they were. I spoke with one them – Joanne Beal – who informed me that the children – all first and second graders from Ella Lewis School – were on a field trip. They had come down from Steuben early that morning – about an hour and a quarter drive in good weather – and taken the early boat out to Little Cranberry.

A good part of their excitement was due to the fact that they had just come from the home of Ashley Bryan – storyteller, writer, and illustrator – who had enthralled them for much of the morning by retelling stories from his books. Books that have made him a living legend among schoolchildren throughout the world.

Ann had an opportunity to speak with one of the youngsters at length. Not at a loss for subject matter, she covered the gamut, but in answer to Ann's question about the nature of her summer vacation, she echoed the sentiments of a multitude of rain-soaked New Englanders – "It was miserable." Matter of fact. But from their buoyant nature, you sure couldn't tell that it had sunk any real expectations of the kids!



Garrett (with Ann)