



My Old Man and the Sea: A Father and Son Sail Around Cape Horn

David Hays , Daniel Hays

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Some fathers and sons go fishing together. Some play ball. David Hays and Daniel Hays sailed 17,000 miles through the world's most feared and fabled waters in a little boat they built together. This is their story.

Alone with nothing but the mammoth waves of the Southern Ocean, the unceasing wind, a compass, a sextant and a pet cat, they voyage down the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal, past the Galapagos Islands, beyond Easter Island and around their destination--Cape Horn. Father and son narrate in alternating fashion, their voices weaving together an engrossing story of travel, exploration and difficult, dangerous sailing.

But more than a tale of adventure, this is a touching account of a father and son's rite of passage as they assess their complex and evolving relationship. Daniel, out of college and unsure of what he wants in his life, sees his father getting older, more forgetful. David deals with unresolved issues he had with his own father, fearful that he'll make the same mistakes with his son, yet frustrated that Daniel treats him like an old man.

Moving, often hilarious, often poignant, *My Old Man and the Sea* is a rich and profound chronicle of their voyage of discovery. Every reader will identify with this uplifting story of a father and son who go down to the sea and find each other.

My Old Man and the Sea: A Father and Son Sail Around Cape Horn Details

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Steve says

Couldn't have chosen a more appropriate book to start a father/son book club with.

It's written by a father/son team about their real life experience sailing around Cape Horn in a small sailboat.

It's written journal-style taking turns between the two men. It's partially about their relationship and the struggles they both have with aging, pride and mortality, and partially about their sailing adventure.

Recommended to sailors and sons.

^ says

This is a book written by two authors. Subtitled '*A father and son sail round Cape Horn*' – as the voyage progresses, each contributes sometimes a paragraph, sometimes several pages. The maps are clear and helpful; though I'd have preferred all maps to have been grouped to fold-out from the front-inside. I temporarily solved *that* problem by keeping a pad of multi-coloured adhesive page markers to hand.

The older man is a highly respected theatre director, and a graduate of Harvard. The younger is a field supervisor at a therapeutic wilderness programme for troubled teenagers in Idaho. Very different – or are they? The relationship is spiced-up by the father's carefully weighed deliberate decision to appoint his son captain of the ship. Why? David's handing over that control is, entirely appropriately, never explicitly answered. The reader is left to engage with a fascinating puzzle, constructing his/her own theories from the evidence presented.

Accompanied by a last-minute furry gift, a spirited male kitten named 'Tiger', the good ship '*Sparrow*' makes her way from The Idea, ... to Panama, ... to the Galápagos, ... Easter Island, ... and thus round the Horn and back via the Falklands (British) and home to New London, Connecticut. It's a great voyage; and certainly no holiday cruise. In different ways the libido of both men; and Force 10 sailing conditions round Cape Horn, see to that!

The power relationship between the two men and their natural affection for Tiger (despite his developing a taste for chewing electrical wiring) is charmingly amusing. The sheer technical and practical competence needed to stack the odds in favour of survival includes a wonderfully humorous account of cooking (pp.113-114) six hundred miles away from the Galápagos. However, and probably irrationally, I do wish that I hadn't read the account of tourism on Easter Island. The necessity of a population trading in order to survive in moderate comfort is entirely understandable; yet is surely to be regretted when and where intangible spiritual qualities of Paradise are threatened?

By no means is this a wholly serious book; and it's all the better for that. However once round Cape Horn, I thought the narrative descended a purr flat, and a whisker sentimental. Relief? American nature? Lack of a clear follow-on goal? Lack of that cat? Hard to know, really.

Wistful?

Beau says

Excellent! Loved the story! Will read again!

Joseph Carrabis says

My Old Man and the Sea is a combined coming-of-age, coming-to-terms and passage story, well worth a read. I was impressed by the honesty of it.

Margaret Schulte says

I love this book, and I return to it over and over. There's one particular passage about cooking on the boat that I read out loud when friends are gathered for a meal on a boat. It is impossible to get through it without laughing hysterically until tears are streaming down my face. It's *that* funny.

But it's not just a funny, lighthearted book. What I love about it is the wide range of emotions that it brings to the reader. You don't have to be a sailor to enjoy the relationship between a father and son getting into dangerous, crazy escapades together.

Grace says

Have you ever had a book that appears out of nowhere from unknown places once upon a time, had it subsequently follow you around everywhere for several years, taunting you at every turn as you both considered and discounted the idea of reading it?

My Old Man and the Sea was that book for the last decade for me.

Granted I do have my suspicions as to where it came from (what rhymes with bomb and has a shopping addiction?), but as to why it was acquired is something I'll never know. It's a father-son story that recounts their true tale of sailing in a tiny sailboat around Cape Horn some time in the 1980s. I'm a girl with a tenuous relationship with my parents, whose most worldly experience involved Disney World and Niagara Falls and who couldn't tell you port from starboard if my life depended on it right now.

All I know for certain is that one day, this book showed up on one of my bookshelves, not-so-subtly tucked between certain books in my collection of fantasy book series without a word or notice from anyone.

And then it began to follow me. It survived three moves, and a couple of book purges. It ended up on my 'to read' list on Goodreads. Don't ask me why or how either, to this day I still don't really know the reason behind it being so... ever-present in my book-reading life. Even though there wasn't much about it that appeared to be of any interest to me both in subject matter or story. And yet, I couldn't drop it.

Finally, I decided it deserved to be exorcised from my life in the only way I knew how to do so: I had to read it. Maybe then it will stop following me. Maybe then I'll be able to comfortably purge it, once I can confirm and make a formal decision of its contents, for good or ill, although I was leaning towards it being an ill.

I admit I ended up being surprised by how much I did end up enjoying the book.

Don't get me wrong; it is still a book about sailing, a topic that more or less sails so far over my head that it needs clearance by the FSA. Ergo, there were plenty enough passages and terms used that ended up being accompanied by 'Huh?' and 'What?' in it that did cut into my ability to enjoy it. Nor did it win me over on the virtues of life on open water or give me the urge to chase the winds. Especially the part where they listed the seven hundred thousand things they had stowed on their boat for this trip. Was that really necessary?

But it still found me on a personal level. Because it was more than just a book about the nitty-gritty of sailing around Cape Horn. It was about the challenge, having to accomplish a difficult goal and facing it head on. It was about accepting that you are only able to control as much as this world will allow, and letting go of the rest. It is about death and life, and how meaningful or meaningless it is depending on how you look at it.

These are all things that we can all relate to; things that doesn't require us to sit on a boat, and know what jibs are what in order for us to contemplate and find meaning within. And in the end, you look towards the title of the book and wonder who was the "Old Man" that it was referring to.

There were so many heartfelt moments, and moments that cut deep in their story. There was plenty of self-reflection, and some levity as well. And I will always remember Tiger, a creature that probably impacted me the most in their story.

But above all, I found relief. It was done; I had finally put down and away a book that has followed me for so long. In some ways, going cover to cover with this book gave me some peace.

A strange thought when it comes to reading a book. But I think in this case, it was somewhat appropriate.

Peter Staadecker says

A great father and son story, starting (well almost) with a Melville quote from the father:

Sailor or landsman, there is some sort of a Cape Horn for all.
Boys! beware of it; prepare for it in time. Gray-beards! thank God it is passed. And ye lucky livers, to whom, by some rare fatality, your Cape Horns are placid as Lake Lemans, flatter not yourselves that good luck is judgment and discretion; for all the yolk in your eggs, you might have foundered and gone down, had the Spirit of the Cape said the word

David and Daniel Hays kit out one of the smallest boats ever to sail around Cape Horn and start their journey. The story alternates between generational/father and son viewpoints. If you like sailing reads, this is both a wonderful sailing read, and a wonderful father and son story.

Kathy says

Father and son David and Dan Hayes took their small sailboat, Sparrow, 17,000 miles from New London, CT to Cape Horn and back. They wrote this book together and what touched me the most was not the dangers they faced or the adventures they enjoyed but their relationship. Not that they always got along! There has to be a captain on a boat and father David resolved that his son Daniel would be the leader. This decision caused much pride and occasional anger. But their humor and love pretty much helped to resolve any situation that arose. Both men write from their hearts and it was a joy to see a father and son so freely love each other.

Karen says

I enjoyed because I love sailing and the ocean. Nothing profound, just enjoyable.

Marianne Shaughnessy says

This is an easy read and a great story not only about sailing around Cape Horn in a small boat and the father-son dynamic but also about life and taking risks. The father and son entries about daily life on a small sailboat are well done but I was taken by their reflections on living and dying. Granted they were experienced sailors, the father had sailed back and forth across the Atlantic, but to choose to sail such a small boat in such a dangerous place when one could lose their life was interesting to reflect on. The book is not all serious reflections. The pair share their adventures on shore at their various stops. Easter Island was particularly interesting. I would recommend viewing the Appendix first to understand all the sail talk and to get a good sense of how small the boat was.

Cynthia Moore says

Terrified of the water but I am drawn to books written about the adventures of others. Haven't been able to get through Moby Dick yet and really do not want to, simply because it was required reading in school. :) But My Old Man ... was enthralling.

Ida-Maria says

Mielenkiintoinen isän ja pojan tarina Cap Hornin ympäripurjehduksesta. Kirjan kahdella kirjoittajalla oli selkäesti omat äänensä ja tarinansa. Kirjan loppu tuli vähän juosten. Ensimmäiset 250 sivua kesti päästä Cap Hornille ja kotiin tultiinkin sitten 70 sivussa. Tuntuikin määränpää olisi ollut tärkeämpi kuin koko matka. Silti mielenkiintoinen teos, joka opetti purjehtimisesta tietämättömälle paljon.

Quinn Helgason says

"My Old Man and The Sea" is an exceptional book to read. Especially because I am a very avid sailor, (I have been sailing since I was four). This book is about David and Daniel Hays, father and son, who sail to Cape Horn which is at the very bottom of South America. Their 17,000 mile voyage across the high waves

and stormy weather of the southern ocean in their homemade sailboat with only a compass, sextant, and a pet cat, not what every father and son does. Not only is it an adventure but also bonding time for father and son to connect as they assess their complex relationship. Daniel, just out of college has no idea what job he wants, and is struggling with job options, and David his father is just getting more forgetful each day. As they go on they have hardships and laughs that go on throughout the book. Overall I found this book really interesting and was very bitter sweet in each moment. I suggest others read this book even not as a sailor, you still will love the book as the deeper you go the more exciting. "My Old Man and The Sea" is the right book for everyone.

Aaron says

I picked up this book on the recommendation of a sailor in Fish Creek Wisconsin. I will give credit where it is due: sailing around Cape Horn in a twenty five foot boat is impressive. That being said, the book was less of a triumph. It lost me several times, hence the low rating.

Eric_W says

My Old Man and the Sea by David and Daniel Hays is about a father and son (respectively) and the growth of their love and respect for each other, and perhaps not inconsistently, the flowering of their independence. That in itself is not so unusual, but most fathers and sons don't build 25 ft sailing yachts to sail around Cape Horn.

The tip of South America has probably the worst weather for any kind of sea vessel of any place on earth. It can take months to beat and tack back and forth against the howling winds that sweep unhindered by any land mass around the bottom of the globe. They were not so foolish as to sail from east to west, so they took a short cut through the Canal on to Easter Island then back around from the west via the Horn. Their voyage covered 17,000 miles and lasted 317 days.

They had an interesting system of reefing the sails for various kinds of weather. It was color-coded with a mnemonic system that related to fear levels. "Red for the first reef stands for 'mere general fear.' [fifteen knot wind] If it blows over twenty, one turns green with nauseating terror, and secures the green line, which is the second reef. Next if it's blowing over thirty knots and shock has set in (the blood has left your extremities), you pull the blue line for the third reef. If the wind picks up more than that, you're scared to death. White is appropriate. That makes the sail tiny."

The voyage continues as father and son explore their past and prior relationship. David remembers Dan's constant pranks at boarding school that necessitated a plea to the headmaster for reinstatement. Dan fears his father's age and other inadequacies - cooking is a jointly recognized incompetence of his, only half-jokingly referred to as "time spent in the galley area, after which, the food scraped out of the utensils and off the walls is served."

David speculates why small boat voyages became a British specialty after the war: "... the cold and damp and bad food on a tiny boat were indistinguishable from home; they didn't realize that they weren't in their living rooms."
