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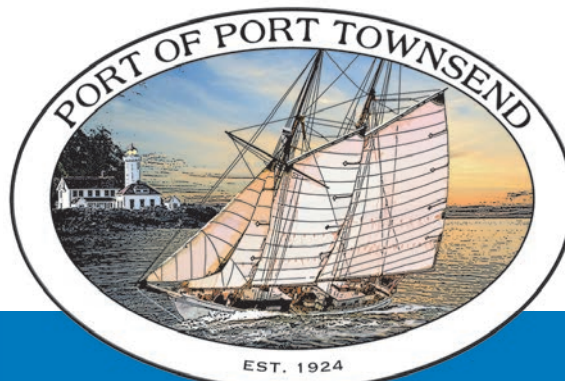
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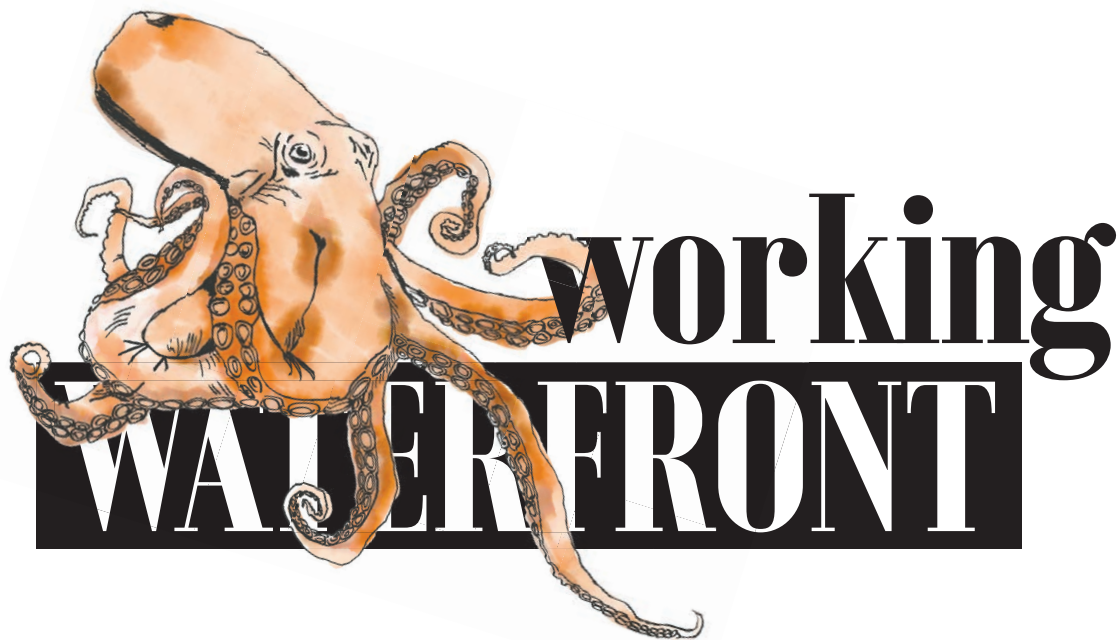
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We've teamed up with award-winning photographers and storytellers to chronicle the lives of those who make a living on the water.

Publishes August 21 • Advertising deadline: July 31
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VOL: 02, ISSUE NO. 02

The Leader

PUBLISHER: LLOYD MULLEN

MANAGING EDITOR: MEREDITH JORDAN

MARKETING DIRECTOR: CYRUS GUBELMAN

STORIES BY: TOM MULLEN, ALEX FRICK, STEVE MULLENSKY

LAYOUT & DESIGN: LLOYD MULLEN

MARKETING: CYRUS GUBELMAN, KACHELE YELACA

HOW TO GET AHOLD OF US:

226 Adams St., Port Townsend, WA 98368

LLOYD MULLEN

lloyd@ptleader.com • ptleader.com • (307) 275-0698

MEREDITH JORDAN

editor@ptleader.com • ptleader.com • (360) 385-2900

CYRUS GUBELMAN

cgubelman@ptleader.com • ptleader.com • (360) 385-2900

COVER PHOTO: Jason Hummel Photography

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Mother of

BY TOM MULLEN

Music has always been a big part of Bill Pearson's life — as a young man, he played in a rock band.

"Life's responsibilities took over to the point of where I quit playing music. I had a family, and while I continued to write, I never pursued it like I did back in the '80s," he said.

Pearson moved to Port Townsend because he recognized a thriving art community and he thought he might draw inspiration to renew his musical ambition.

"I wrote this song about a unicorn, of all things, which is not my style, really. And then I started doing artwork and created scenes."

Then he sent the work to a friend.

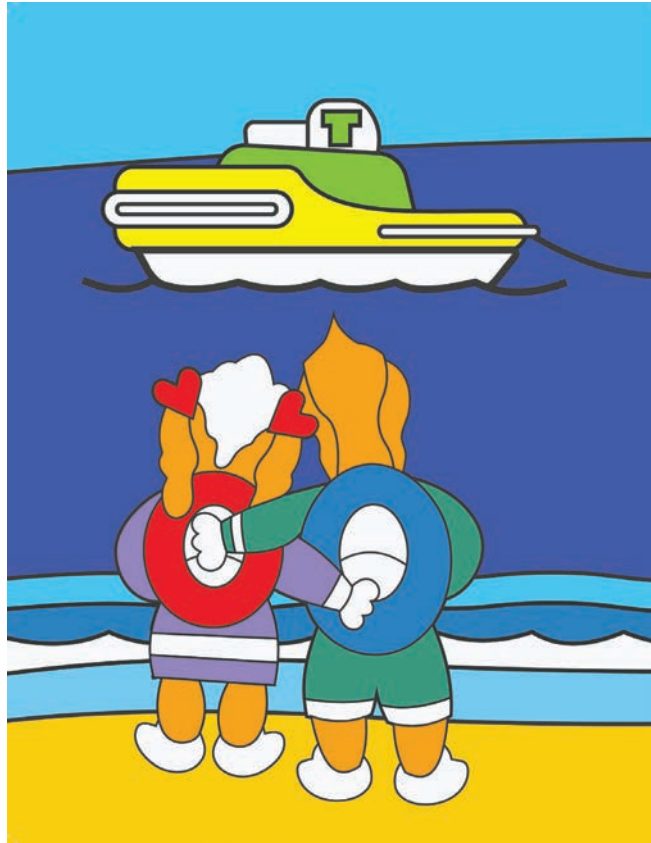
"They said, 'oh my gosh, you need to write children's books.'"

The idea, he said, had never occurred to him but with his construction business lock-downed in the throes of COVID, he began to write what evolved into singalong books for children.

"I didn't know how to write children's books but I knew how to write songs, so I wrote about two puppies," he recalled of his foray into publishing.



Bill Pearson plays his guitar at the beach.



Hope and Jude enjoy the wonders of the waters off Port Townsend.

Armed with themes of hugs and love, he found a willing partner.

“I found out I could publish on Amazon for free and I did it just so I could have a few copies for myself, but it kind of snowballed from there,” he explained. Pearson ended up writing and publishing 10 books in all, each with instructions on how to access a recorded version of his music on the internet.

When COVID disappeared, Pearson focused his energy on his construction business, setting aside his musical career once more. That is, until he mentioned his venture into children’s publishing to a neighbor who encouraged him to let The Leader write a story about his work.

“He said, ‘this is really good.’ I think COVID was a time when everybody was becoming so divided with everything that was happening — kids couldn’t go to school, kids couldn’t be around their friends. What we really needed was love, rather than locking us down, and that’s the basis of the books.”

Writing the books, he said, gave him the sanity, the hugs and the love to make it through some tough times. He found it easy to write, given the time and privacy foisted upon him. He had a young relative, a two-year-old grand niece, who fell in love with the work.

“She became obsessed with these books so I knew I had a good thing here. They’re very colorful and she wanted to read the books and hear the songs.”

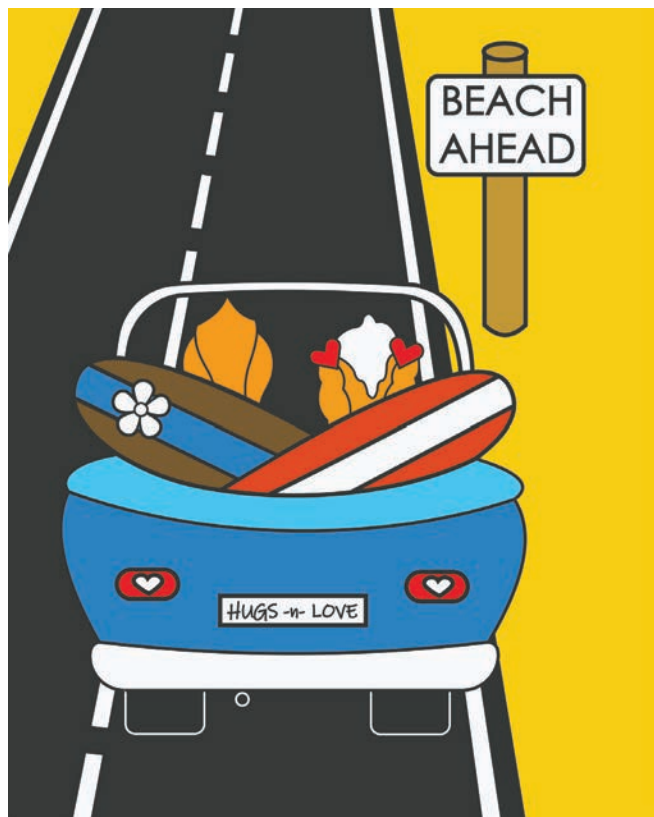
His early work focused on young children. Eventually his characters began to grow up, and soon he began writing books to celebrate holidays like Christmas, and a Valentine book.

“I did a song on how to dance — those later books are focused on an older group — young teens play the characters.

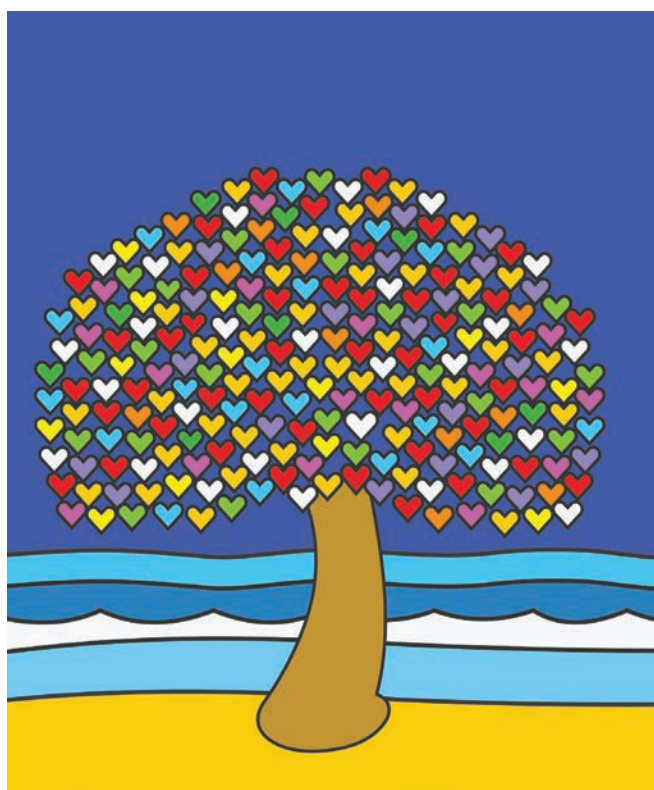
The characters, Hope and Jude, search for love and hugs everywhere and in their second adventure, they go to the beach, where they will play.

“They’ll find the hugs and they’ll find the love. Hope and Jude are trying to find the love throughout the world,” Pearson explained.

“They’re a little bit more grown up — they realize that life has just begun for them — that’s this part of their journey,” Pearson said.

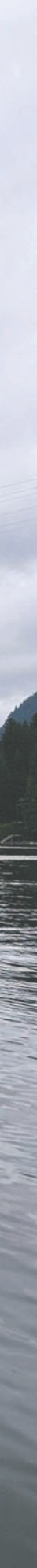


Hope and Jude decide to spend a day at the beach.



A recurring character in his book, the Tree of Hearts, sees its leaves carried away to various places and people.





Race to Alaska demands skill, fortitude and fun

BY ALEX FRICK

On June 9, seafarers will embark on a 750-mile race through one of the world's most complex waterways. There is only one rule: no motors are allowed.

Race to Alaska is an annual sailboat event that celebrates self-reliance. Hosted by the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend, sailors will glide north through the raw and unpredictable frigid seas of Alaska's Inside Passage until they finally cross the finish line in Ketchikan, Alaska.

The R2AK was the first of its kind when it debuted in 2015 and remains the longest human and wind-powered race in North America.

The rules for the race are intentionally as simple as possible. All varieties of vessels are welcome to participate — if a motor doesn't power them. Once the sailors leave the docks in Port Townsend, they are on their own. There are no support, reinforcements, or supply drops; from the moment they set sail, seafarers will be at the mercy of Poseidon's will.

Each year, the stakes are high. The winning team receives a \$10,000 top prize, and the second-place team takes home a brand-new set of steak knives. Watch "Glengarry Glen Ross" to find out what third place receives.



In 2023, 33 teams left the dock with visions of glory, but Team We Brake for Whales was the first to cross the finish line. On the deck of the winning Custom Lyman Morse 40 cycle-powered ocean cruiser was Captain Jeanne Goussev, an R2AK mainstay.

She said the race is anything but predictable.

"You don't know what you're waking up to every time you get out of a bunk," said Goussev. "You might hear somebody on bicycles whirring behind you, and you're like, 'Oh, great, there's no wind!' Or you might hear total chaos, like World War III going on above your head with the winches cranking, and the wind is howling, and you're on a serious angle, and the boat is just straining under you."

Goussev is not racing this year, but she will assist with the race's communications team.

Peter Allen, a paddler based out of Vancouver, B.C., is seeking to become the second stand-up paddler to complete all 750 miles of the R2AK, second only to Karl Kruger, who completed the course in 2017. Last year, Allen's attempt came to an abrupt halt, busting a wing in Klemtu, BC after completing nearly 400 miles of the journey.

While he said it may be difficult to keep up with the ocean cruiser sailboats, he said there is only one goal — crossing the finish line. "You know, for me it's more about finishing the thing and competing with my kind of self-limits, rather than winning," said Allen.



The race is divided into two stages. The first section is the “Proving Ground,” a 40-mile sprint from Port Townsend, Washington, to Victoria, B.C. Racers who make it to Victoria without assistance will be allowed to continue. For many, the sprint serves as a trial run to assess the vessel on open water before committing to the final 710 miles. Sailors will have nearly two days to repair or tweak their boats in Victoria before the real journey begins.

The average time to complete the race varies significantly by the forces of Mother Nature. Typically, the race should take about a total of four days to complete, but hypothetically there is a chance no one finishes. There is no such thing as a typical day in the R2AK.

Following behind is a sweep boat that serves as a rolling disqualifier. If a race boat is passed by the steadily cruising vessel, that team is officially out of the race.

While the race is open to all boats, that does not mean anyone can participate. The journey can be extremely dangerous. Outside of avoiding boredom and icy death, a team faces numerous possible adversaries. It might be winds against the current, giant whirlpools, beelining freighters, short and steep seas. They might be called up to recover overboard crew — itself a life-threatening occurrence — or see a sprinkling of wild grizzlies salivating onshore.

Because of the hazardous nature of the Inside Passage, sailors who wish to participate must pass a

vetting process in which the folks at the Northwest Maritime Center evaluate skills, including navigation, first aid, repair, logistics and collision awareness. However, once deemed worthy, it is all sails, open seas and no anchor.

The race begins at 5 a.m. on June 9 at the Port Townsend Maritime Center; however, residents can meet the sailors and wish them safe passage before the race on June 8 at the R2AK Pre-Race Ruckus.

The Ruckus takes place from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend. As described by the R2AK committee, The Ruckus has all the spirit of the race to Alaska, with only 10% of the danger. Here, visitors can meet the competitors and check out the boats before they leave the following day. It’s an opportunity to wish the sailors smooth seas while enjoying great food and drinks, and maybe even get a free tattoo (if the tattoo is an R2AK logo).

“It is just chaos in the streets. It’s super fun,” said Goussev. “You can see the boats before they take off, talk to a lot of racers directly, and ask them lots of questions about their motivations and their plan and all of that.”

Once the racers set sail, individuals who decide to remain sanely ashore can follow the progress of the race and be a “tracker junkie.” Visit r2ak.com after the race has begun. A feature will give you a live GPS tracking map of where each vessel is currently located, including their nautical speed.



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MINDING THE

BY TOM MULLEN

In Kansas there are no mountains and no ocean.

“And I need mountains and I need oceans,” Sail Port Townsend’s Amber Heasley confessed of her move from the flat-landed fields to land’s end.

Feeling the need to travel and the freedom to explore, her wanderlust took her in Port Townsend. She said that she’s always loved travel in its various iterations, planes, trains, horses and feet.

“Then I met boats, which is obviously the coolest the way to get around,” she said.

“I think sailing is the best activity to do in Port Townsend, it’s a gorgeous venue — I like steep learning curves and for sailing, it hasn’t stopped for me yet.”

She described the experience as one that requires the sailor to be super-mindful, in-tune with the weather, the water the wind, and then to continually sense and respond to

those stimuli.

“Things can change quickly on a boat — you’re in a constant flow-state of decision making so it definitely trains you to make decisions and respond to whatever is thrown at you.”

Heasley’s said that her teaching methods guarantee each student has a “good day” on the water.

“I enjoy instructing because it’s a passion for me and I love being able to share that. I enjoy breaking down the complex concepts and seeing people understand, and master it too. It’s really rewarding.”

Simple concepts, she explained, make the difference, like learning how to trim a sail to changing winds, develop a sense of where the wind is coming from, and then how to harness that energy — even to move a boat up and into the wind.

Her goal, she said is to make people love sailing.

Amber Heasley takes a breather on the boom.
Photo courtesy Joelle Fisher.







Amber Heasley told Working Waterfront that she wants her students to have an idyllic experience. Photo courtesy Jason Hummel Photography.

“That first time, some people can get really traumatized, especially if they are out with really inexperienced people or in conditions that are too extreme. We want to make sailing seem easy, because it is.”

Heasley began sailing for profit as a charter business but customer demand led her to teach new students as well as new instructors. She lauds the learning one accrues from spending time with books and online videos, but much of sailing, she said, is kinesthetic.

“You have to get out on the water and try,” she explained. “Formal training is nice, especially for people who are trying to be self-taught. This can fill in some gaps in learning — you’ve got to make mistakes and someone has got to be able to say, ‘That was a mistake.’ It’s really helpful to watch other people make mistakes.”

Heasley encourages wannabe boaters to “get out there and go out with as many people and on as many boats as you can.”

Sometimes a person learns what not to do by watching others make mistakes.

She credits much of her own learning to a septuagenarian named Maxine, a small-framed woman who is adept at single-handing a 40-footer.

“It’s cool to try to pick something new,” Heasley professed. “You learn a little bit about yourself and it gets you out of your patterns, and helps you reconnect with other people. Especially for couples who are trying to connect.”

Despite the call of the sea, Heasley said she still returns to Kansas to visit her mother and siblings.

“And go motor boating on the lake.”





Amber Heasley instructs a young couple in the waters off Port Townsend.
Photo courtesy Jason Hummel Photography.

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CHOIR BOY

BY TOM MULLEN

Colleen Farrell is watching for his return. He's slimmed down quite a bit since he left for Hawaii.

"He loses about a third of his body weight in the winter time. From 45 tons, he might drop down to 30 tons — they don't eat in the warm water."

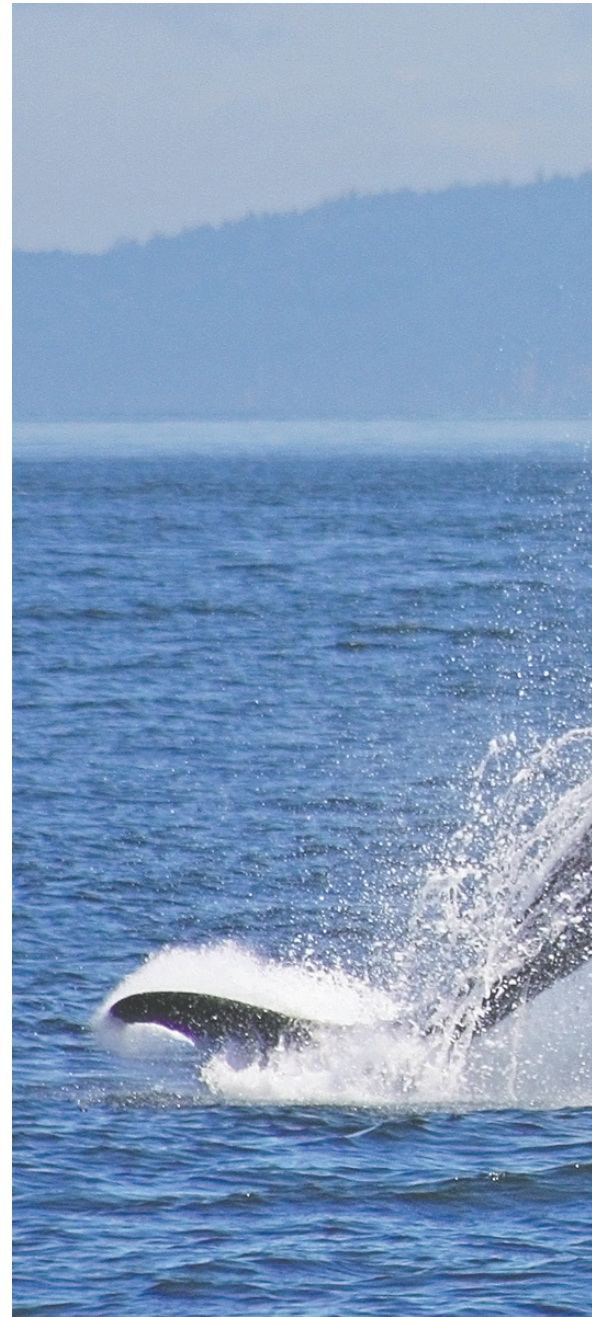
Farrell is a naturalist for Puget Sound Express and she is pining for her favorite animal, a humpback whale named Two Spot.

He's made the annual five- to six-thousand mile journey for more than two decades now.

"That's why they migrate — when the baby is born they don't have an insulating layer of blubber so they have to be born in significantly warmer water," she explained.

Two Spot has no tracking device other than the spots on his flukes, which power his travel and are aided by his pectoral fins to steer.

"Humpbacks have loose social bonds — they do have friends but also enemies. We have a lot of Bigg's Killer Whales and they are the mammal-eating killer whales. Even though they mainly target young humpbacks, you'll rarely see adults in the same area with killer whales at the same time," said Farrell.





A humpback captured trying to fly. Photo courtesy Puget Sound Express/Justine Buckmaster

After fasting in warm waters, Two Spot spends his summers here as a voracious eater.

“They come to feed on small schooling fish and they can eat up to a ton in one feeding session,” she explained, “sometimes that takes a few minutes, or he might eat that in one or two lunges.”

Farrell said that humpbacks like Two Spot are known to cooperate in a method called bubble net feeding.

“They make a ring around the school of fish and then they take turns lunging through that net, although sometimes they go all at the same time. They’ve only been observed using that strategy in Alaska but just because we haven’t observed it, doesn’t mean they don’t do it here,” she said.

When not eating or traveling, Two Spot rests in a fitful sleep known as unihemispheric.

“He sleeps with half his brain on and half his brain off,” Farrell explained.

“When you’re in the ocean, where food may be spaced miles apart, you have to be always on the hunt, always on the move. Two Spot can never fully sleep because he has the inconve-



nience of having lungs. Lungs are quite inconvenient if you’re living in the water. If he fully fell asleep, he could potentially drown.”

The waters off Jefferson County are near perfect for Two Spot’s summertime needs.

“We have a really rich food system here because of the past glacier situation. The sounds and the straights create a lot of upwelling from the cold, deeper, nutrient-rich waters which runs to the underwater hillsides. Then, as



A humpback breaches to the delight of Puget Sound Express passengers. Photo courtesy Puget Sound Express/
Brian Goldberg



Colleen Farrell scopes a whale. Photo courtesy Puget Sound Express

those currents get forced upwards, all the little fish and smaller animals get a nutrient bomb and are able to school together near the surface, which is where humpbacks like to eat.”

When winter weather beckons him to warmer climes, Two Spot will return to Hawaii.

“Humpback whales stay frisky throughout the end of their life. The females don’t go through menopause and the males continue to stay active. So as Two Spot comes to the end of his life he’ll continue that migration,” she said. Mothers and calves stay together only about a year. Humpback males are non-monogamous, mating with different partners every year, when and if they can find a mate.

Two Spot, like all males, is a part of an oceanic choir. Humpbacks are known for their songs when in the breeding grounds.

“People assume because the song is only sung by males, it is synonymous with that of bird songs, but when humpback males sing, the females are not necessarily attracted to that,” Farrell said.

“Often the males will come together and sing in a chorus and some think that this

is a way for the females to choose the best mate.”

Two Spot’s choir breaks up in Puget Sound where humpbacks remain fairly silent other than small vocalizations and physical body language like, “those 15-foot flippers flapping and full breaches — a whale trying to fly. We do assume that’s a communication form but we’re not sure,” she added.

Chroniclers of whales have noted that their songs change.

“One lyric gets altered and it’s a big game of telephone, which is carried across the North Pacific. All the humpbacks will change their song to match each others — you’ve got to be up to date on the latest,” she said.

The great news for Two Spot and the people of Jefferson County is that humpback populations have enjoyed a unique recovery story.

“They were estimated to be depleted to 5,000 individuals and we now have 20,000 just in the North Pacific. So it is possible for people to care about something and actually make a change.”

“The humpbacks are just such a flagship for that possibility.”



His ID number is BCZ0432 but he’s known as “Two Spot” because each of his flukes brandishes two spots. Photo courtesy Puget Sound Express



SEA WOLVES PLAY



A female orca breaches with a harbor porpoise on her fin.
She was teaching her young how to hunt.
Photos by Steve Mullensky

A female orca plays with her food by carrying a harbor porpoise on her nose somewhere in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.





Orcas pass by a sightseeing boat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.



A female orca flips a harbor porpoise to stun it so it cannot escape in the Strait of Juan de Fuca off Marrowstone Island.




Orcas pass by a sightseeing boat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

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