

# Homeward Bound on the *Charles W. Morgan*

by Matthew H. Bullard



The sky was overcast, a steel gray. The passage down Vineyard Sound was uneventful, the water was nearly flat, and there was only light wind. The slow roll of the ship was almost relaxing. Groups of people were gathered at the try works and near the main mast, engaged in quiet conversation. We passed Tarpaulin Cove to starboard. We were approaching Quick's Hole and soon began a slow turn to starboard and down the center of the channel between Pasque and Nashawena Islands.

The bow had barely touched the choppy waters of Buzzard's Bay when the captain gave the order to cast off the tug and set sail. The crew took to the rig, setting lower and upper topsails, inner and outer jibs, fore, main and mizzen topmast staysails, the large foresail, and finally the

main topgallant. I was sailing into Buzzards Bay on the whaling bark *Charles W. Morgan* on our way home to New Bedford, and this was not a dream.

## Boyhood Dreams

When I was a boy, I dreamed of sailing on a whaling ship. At the time, the dream seemed about as far-fetched as they come. Even kids who dreamed of being an astronaut could at least aspire to the space program. The closest thing I had was a half-scale model of a whaling ship inside the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

My imagination was further stoked when I would visit my grandparents' house. It was full of old whaling-era relics: a large half-hull model of the whaling ship *William J. Rotch*, pieces of scrimshaw, and even a scale model of the *Charles W. Morgan*. I would stare at its intricate rigging and imagine what it would be like to sail on a real wooden whaling ship.

My dad actually lived in an old whaling-era relic: an ornate, gothic revival "cottage" in New Bedford. My fourth great-grandfather William J. Rotch built the house in 1846 after marrying Emily Morgan, a daughter of Charles W. Morgan. The house is emblematic of that great line from *Moby-Dick* describing New Bedford's beautiful homes: "Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. One and all, they were harpooned and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea." My ancestors, the Rotches and Crapos, lived almost continuously in the house for 167 years.



I grew up in and around New Bedford, went to an elementary school founded in the early 1800's by the Rotches and attended by many generations of my family, including my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, to name just a few. Sailing, particularly with my grandparents, became my first real passion. When I was not sailing, I dreamed about it. I loved everything about sailing, from the technical details of how to make a boat sail into the wind to the quiet enjoyment of time spent with family and friends in nature. Growing up, I never imagined a life away from boats and the ocean.

In high school, rowing became my second passion. I rowed competitively through college, earning a varsity letter for three years on the banks of the Raritan River in New Jersey at Rutgers University. Rowing was like a natural extension of sailing. I loved the competition, camaraderie, and the quest for perfection required to make an eight-oared shell swing.

After earning an undergraduate degree in atmospheric science from Rutgers, I moved back to Massachusetts and worked for a company that sent me around the country training TV weather forecasters how to use the company's weather broadcast software. It was this travel that opened my eyes to the potential for life away from the ocean. Once I saw the mountains of the west, I fell in love.

In 1999, I moved to Boise, Idaho, a place about as different from New Bedford as one can imagine: landlocked, dry, not an ocean in sight, no family, and not a single friend. The first year was tough, but I stayed, eventually met the woman who would become my wife, and started a family.

I still get excited to come home to New Bedford. I love where I am from and I love the chance to spend time with my family. But coming home has always been tough--there is never enough time to see everyone and everything. It was only within the last few years that I stopped being asked if I would be moving *back home*. I suppose that's what happens when you start a family--home suddenly becomes where you live with your family, not just the place where you grew up, went to school, and where your parents live.

### *Endeavour*

I had an incredible summer job when I was 16. I had written the owner of the 130 foot J-Class yacht *Endeavour* asking if she needed any crew for the summer. I sent the letter off without any expectation of a reply, so I was surprised when I got a call from the captain offering me the job. Soon enough, I was headed to Newport for my first summer away from home. The excitement soon changed to terror as reality set in. I had never been away from home and this was to be my first taste of complete independence (inasmuch as one can be truly independent while working and living on a luxury yacht with a professional chef). Upon arrival, I was green, to say the least. I knew my way around smaller boats, but a 130-foot restored America's Cup yacht? No way.

I remember my first day in Newport, meeting the other eight members of the crew and being outfitted with a uniform. I was terrified, immediately homesick, and wondered just what I had

gotten myself into. My first job as the new deckhand was being sent up the 165-foot mast to clean the stainless steel rig.

Shortly after settling into the routine of Newport, we set sail for New Bedford. *Endeavour* had been recently restored and sailed for the first time since the 1930's only the year before. She was due for some routine maintenance. We sailed into New Bedford harbor and anchored inside the hurricane barrier. We were so close to shore that I had to free a stray fishing lure cast onto deck by a fisherman standing on shore. He had inadvertently caught himself more than his small rod and reel could handle.

The next day we were hauled out of the water and the work began. I was sent up the rig again, but this time we were high and dry. If I had fallen, I would have bounced off the deck and fallen another twenty feet to the hard concrete below.

The view was incredible from up there. It seemed as if I was as high as the spire of the Fairhaven Unitarian Church and that I could swing from the halyard that tethered me to the mast to the buildings of downtown New Bedford across the harbor. The most difficult part of the first part of this trip was spending a very lonely night on board while hauled out at the yard in Fairhaven. It was strange to feel so alone in a place so close to home.

One of the more memorable events of my summer on *Endeavour* was a day sail on Vineyard Sound. As our guests boarded for the day, our captain introduced me to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. As I shook her hand, she looked at me through her oversized sunglasses and told me in her inimitable, tender voice that it was a pleasure to meet me. I could not believe that she was gracious enough to engage even a lowly deckhand!



As we sailed in light winds of Vineyard Sound later that morning, I became aware that the captain was concerned about the amount of water under our 16-foot deep keel. I had a position manning one of the running backstays just aft of the wheel, and as the depth sounder slowly ticked down below 20 feet, the captain, somewhat comically, handed the wheel to the first

mate just before we unceremoniously came to a slow stop as the keel buried itself in the sandy bottom of Middle Shoal. We spent the rest of the morning as a curious tourist attraction for the many pleasure boaters cruising Vineyard Sound. We even asked all of the guests, Mrs. Onasis included, to move to the narrow bow of the boat in the hopes that our combined weight would allow us to pivot free of our temporary sand berth. No luck--only the rising tide freed us a couple of hours later.

After taking *Endeavour* to Maine, Nova Scotia, and back, I was a different person. I had not only learned to sail a J-Class yacht, but I also had grown more comfortable being away from home. I learned to live and work cooperatively with others in very close quarters with little privacy, not unlike those who shipped out on the *Charles W. Morgan* (only with better food). I returned home a more self-sufficient and self-reliant person.

Sailing down Vineyard Sound, through Quick's Hole, and entering Buzzards Bay at the end of the summer was bittersweet. My time on *Endeavour* was not always easy. I was well outside of my comfort zone much of the time. The experience prepared me for life away from home and parents. I was extremely fortunate to have been given the opportunity to work on such an incredible yacht with a remarkable international crew who accelerated my transition from boyhood into the adult world.

### *Morgan* Homecoming, Part One

Imagine my surprise when I learned that Mystic Seaport planned not only to sail the *Charles W. Morgan* following an extensive restoration but also to bring her back to her original home port of New Bedford. I *had* to be on her, but I figured my chances of standing on her deck while she sailed home were small. When Mystic Seaport announced plans to include small groups of "38th Voyagers" selected from the public on each leg of the trip to help document the voyage, I decided to submit a proposal (this essay is the final result). Much like my letter to the owner of *Endeavour*, I did not think I had much of a chance of being selected, but I guessed that Mystic Seaport might be interested in having a descendant of the ship's original owner and namesake on board when they brought her home to New Bedford.

When the date for notification of selection came and went, I assumed that I had been passed over, perhaps even for another one of the many hundreds of *Morgan* descendants alive today. Jody and I had long been planning a visit to Massachusetts to coincide with the *Morgan*'s return to New Bedford, so I would at least get to witness the spectacle in person.

At last, an email from Mystic Seaport appeared in my inbox. When I read it notifying me that I had been chosen to sail aboard the *Morgan* for her return to New Bedford, I jumped out of my chair and nearly put my head through the low basement ceiling of my home office.

Last June, we headed for home, first by plane for the long cross-country flight from Idaho, then by car, and finally, by boat. After spending several days in central Massachusetts visiting with Jody's family, we took the ferry from Woods Hole to the Vineyard for a couple of days of sightseeing before the *Morgan's* planned departure.

As the *Island Home* rounded West Chop, I could see the tall masts of the *Morgan* inside Vineyard Haven harbor. The *Morgan* was berthed at the end of a low, wooden wharf. She shared the harbor with the schooners *Shenandoah* and *Alabama* and a flotilla of other beautiful classic yachts.

After we were settled into our bed and breakfast, I walked down to the harbor to get my first look at the *Morgan* fully rigged. She was a sight to behold on a perfect summer day.

If felt as if I were stepping back in time when I boarded the *Morgan* a couple of days later. Jody and Oliver climbed aboard with me and helped me pick out my bunk. Oliver was delightfully oblivious to the magnitude of the moment for me. After a brief introduction from the crew, I bid Jody and Oliver goodbye and followed the rest of the voyagers on an orientation to the ship prior to the planned passage to New Bedford the following day.



As twilight faded to night, fireflies burned streaks through the rigging and I made my way below. I was not sure how long it would take to get settled for bed in the very cramped fo'c's'le that I would be sharing with 23 other souls. I crammed myself into the tiny bunk, the farthest aft bunk on the starboard side, lower level. It was warm, but a fan provided fresh air and a dull thrum that helped to drown out the sounds of my fellow shipmates various states of (un)rest. I cannot say I



slept comfortably or very much at all. I was anxious for the sail the following day, worried about the weather, and concerned that we would have to delay our departure from the Vineyard.

### *Arcadia*

A few years after my summer aboard *Endeavour*, I reconnected with that yacht's engineer who was then running a 69-foot cruising and racing sloop out of Marion called *Arcadia*. Skip asked me to be the deckhand for a summer of cruising and racing between Newport and downeast Maine. I eagerly signed on and ended up spending part or all of the next several summer seasons as either hired crew or a guest.

During my second summer aboard *Arcadia*, we competed in the Newport to Bermuda race. The race was thrilling (we placed third in our class) and Bermuda was beautiful. After several days in Bermuda, we assembled a crew to deliver the boat back to Marion. We had a small crew of seven, including the artist Peter Stone, Dave Bill (a teacher and sailing instructor from my high school), a college student and her boyfriend, and the teenage son of one of our racing crew. It was a small group and only four of us had experience. For safety, we set out on the return trip in the company of several other yachts making the same passage home.



The first couple of days out of Bermuda were marked by beautiful, blue-water sailing. *Arcadia* climbed the backs of 15 foot seas and surfed down their breaking faces, sometimes reaching 17 knots. It was exhilarating sailing and I was having the time of my life. Two of the younger crew members, though, were stricken by seasickness in the rough seas.

The weather began to deteriorate at the end of our second day. The wind had increased to 25-30 knots, the seas grew higher, and there were frequent squalls of thunder and lightning. A call came over the radio, “MAYDAY MAYDAY MAYDAY.” One of the boats sailing back in our convoy was in distress. Caught in the same worsening weather, the captain went forward to lower the headsail and was swept overboard. We were the closest boat and as such, we had an obligation to initiate a search for the missing man and the stricken vessel. We altered course, but it was tough sailing into a strong wind and heavy seas.

As evening approached, the weather continued to deteriorate. Skip made the difficult decision to alter our course away from the search area. By continuing on, we would have risked our own lives sailing into worsening weather on the edge of the Gulf Stream. We bore away, reduced sail, and left the search to other vessels and the Coast Guard, who had finally arrived on the scene. Squalls made the seas rough and confused. We sailed into the stormy night accompanied by nearly continuous thunder and lightning and the occasional *thwack-thwack-thwack* of a passing rescue helicopter. I retreated to my bunk at midnight to try and get a few hours of sleep before my next watch.

When I awoke at 0400, it was still dark and stormy. We were running before the wind in heavy seas. I pulled on my foul weather gear and sea boots. Just as I was about to step on deck, we were hit by the most intense squall yet. The wind screamed through the rigging, the boat heeled, thunder and lightning crashed directly over us, the huge seas threatened to swallow us. As the wind shrieked into a wicked crescendo, I heard a loud crack and felt the boat suddenly lurch and begin to roll, out of control. I had no idea what was going on, but I rushed on deck to help lower sail. Once Peter and I had the mainsail down, we both stayed at the mast with our arms around the halyards, looking up into the sky as constant lightning lit the clouds as if it were day.

With the worst of the squall over, Skip assembled the crew on deck to assess the situation. During that one big gust, Dave and Peter were both holding onto the wheel, trying to prevent a knockdown when the steering quadrant, a large steel fitting that connects the wheel to the rudder, exploded from the rudder post. We assembled the emergency steering rig and regained some semblance of control of the boat in the still-heavy seas.

As dawn broke, the weather began to moderate. We raised a small jib and began to take inventory of our situation. Skip recounted that he heard the pitch of the wind increase through the rig even as the needle of the anemometer topped out at 55 knots. We had made it through the worst of the storm with all souls still on board. Once again, we turned for home.

Our own near-disaster notwithstanding, it had already been an emotional trip looking for a man lost at sea and wondering how lonely and scared his two companions must have felt, all alone in the wine-dark ocean on a disabled boat. The man was never found but his two companions were rescued and the Coast Guard was able to salvage the boat.

We limped home, motor-sailing most of the rest of the way. We reached Quick's Hole, the entrance to Buzzard's Bay, before sunrise in pea soup fog. We navigated from buoy to buoy through the narrow channel, a fitting demonstration of Skip's seamanship and our now-practiced use of the emergency steering mechanism.



Later that morning, we rounded Great Hill and picked up our mooring. I still remember the look of relief on my Mom's face when she met us at the dock. Apparently, news of the storm and the lost sailor had reached home and been broadcast on the news, but nobody had known the names of the boats involved. Only when we came into radio range could we confirm that we were safe.

These days, returning home in relative safety is a decidedly modern occurrence. Sailors who left New Bedford on the *Morgan* during her whaling career frequently risked their lives for their profession. Those men (and sometimes women) sailed away from home for several years to the most remote and dangerous locations on earth, pursued and captured great whales in open boats with hand-thrown harpoons, and climbed the rigging without harnesses in hurricane-force winds. That some of them would not return home with their ship can hardly be a surprise, given the risks inherent to their dangerous trade.

While my own journey home from Bermuda on *Arcadia* ended happily for us, not everyone was so fortunate. We were unable to find the man swept off his yacht during the storm and we knew that somewhere, someone would never see their father or husband or son again. Our relief of making it home was tempered by this loss, one that is thankfully rare in these safety-conscious modern times.

### *Morgan* Homecoming, Part Two

There was not much sleep in the fo'c'sle of the *Charles W. Morgan*, for me or anyone else. The historically accurate bunk was impossibly small, much shorter than my 6'4" frame. While Mystic Seaport had outfitted each bunk with a mattress and some privacy curtains, they did not provide much relief. There were 23 other souls crammed into their own tiny bunks. That being said, I was not on board the *Morgan* to sleep and I figured that I would be so high on adrenaline during our sail that the lack of rest would not be a problem.



I extracted myself from my bunk before six AM, pulled on some clothes as quietly as possible, and climbed on deck to greet the morning.

My anxiety about whether or not we would make the transit to New Bedford was eased by the mostly clear skies and light, south wind, the makings of a pleasant day. I poured a cup of

yesterday's coffee and leaned on the bulwarks to watch Vineyard Haven harbor wake up. The first car ferry from Woods Hole arrived, disembarking throngs of summer tourists. Early morning sun splashed across the *Morgan's* intricate rigging. In the harbor, the two schooners *Shenandoah* and *Alabama* lay at anchor in the middle of the harbor.

More bleary-eyed voyagers and crew filtered on deck and hot coffee was brewed. Early morning whispered conversations soon gave way to more hustle and bustle as the coffee began to take hold. Breakfast was served in the blubber room, but everyone ate on deck. Finally, the official call was made: we would be sailing for New Bedford.

After breakfast, the Voyagers were asked to gather on shore for a meeting with the invited guests. I guessed this was meant to clear the decks of greenhorns so the crew could prepare the ship for the day's sail. As we gathered on shore, I heard commands being issued and repeated as the crew took to the rig and began preparing the ship to sail. I became anxious that I was missing something. As our cohort of Voyagers and guests gathered for introductions, I was excited to see Kin Howland, a descendant of the legendary Howland whaling family, among the day's guests.

After our introductions, we walked back down Tisbury Wharf and boarded the *Charles W. Morgan*. I said to one of my fellow Voyagers that I could not believe that this was actually going to happen. I felt like I was floating on air.

Back on deck, a safety demonstration was given and all the voyagers were assigned to a watch with the professional crew so we could more-easily assist with the sailing of the ship. Once complete, the bustle of activity took on a new urgency. Captain Files calmly orchestrated the complex process of readying the *Morgan* for departure from atop the hurricane house at the stern of the ship. He kept his eyes looking aloft at the pennants flying in the light morning breeze. The tug *Sirius* came along our port quarter and was made fast.



Captain Files issued the order to cast off the lines tethering the *Morgan* to Tisbury Wharf. I hoped that Jody and Oliver had made it to the waterfront in time to see us off. With the tug's engine pushing, the *Morgan* eased away from the wharf and out into the harbor. Later, we learned that Captain Files had hoped to sail off of the

wharf without assistance from a tug, but the wind was not favorable for such a demonstration of seamanship.

It could not have been more than a couple of minutes of tug-assisted movement before Captain Files gave orders to cast off the tug so we could sail the rest of the way out of Vineyard Haven Harbor. Free of the tug and under the power of lower topsails, fore and main topmast staysails, and the inner jib, I was, at last, sailing on a whaling ship. Even with the light wind and calm, protected waters of the harbor, I could instantly recognize that the *Morgan* was under her own power. The feel of a ship making way under sail is unmistakable, more so, perhaps, because our vessel was making her own way for the first time in so many years.

As quickly as we were sailing, it was over. The tug *Sirius* came back alongside and the hawser was attached so we could be towed around West Chop and down Vineyard Sound.

### Mamoo and Poppop

I called my paternal grandparents Mamoo and Poppop. They were important figures in my life and I had a close relationship with both of them. When my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was a baby, they helped care for me during her recovery. I would visit their big house overlooking Buzzard's Bay almost every summer weekend to swim in their pool, throw a football on their lawn, and play golf and tennis. We gathered there for big holiday dinners with cousins and uncles and aunts. I learned to sail with them on Buzzard's Bay and in downeast Maine.



Poppop was a renaissance man: it seemed as if he knew everything without a hint of arrogance. He was kind and loved to garden, golf, and sail. While not an overly warm or affectionate person, he was always open and welcoming. I never doubted that he loved me, even though I only heard him say it to me once.

Mamoo was larger than life: she had a big booming voice, gave enormous hugs, and was never afraid to say what she felt. Like Poppop, she also loved to garden, golf and sail. She was warm and affectionate and I never doubted that she loved me because she always told me so. I always felt at home with them.

I had been living in Boise for a little more than three years when I flew home to celebrate Thanksgiving with my family. Before I returned Boise, I drove one last time to Mamoo and Poppop's house to say goodbye. Poppop was being treated for prostate cancer and was in pain. After lunch, he excused himself so he could rest. But before I left, I moved closer to him and told him that I loved him before saying goodbye. In a strained voice, he told me that he loved me, too. I had never heard him say those words to me before, though I never doubted they were true. They were the last words he ever spoke to me. He died the day after Christmas.



I'll never forget walking through the back door of their house when I returned for his service. I was terrified and sad. So many times I had walked through that door and heard Mamoo's voice calling out, "Hello!" I would walk into their kitchen where I might expect to see Poppop standing up from a paper or book to welcome me. This time, Mamoo greeted us quietly, her eyes red with sorrow. I had asked my Dad on the drive over if he thought I might be able to have Poppop's blue- and white-striped railroad engineer's cap that he wore when sailing and gardening. When Mamoo came out of their bedroom holding the cap, I melted into a puddle of tears and nearly collapsed into her arms. Never had I felt so empty with the void created by his loss. As always, Mamoo's hug was comforting and filled me with love.

Poppop's memorial service was at the First Unitarian Church in New Bedford. It was packed. The words that were spoken about my grandfather were powerful and positive, but what I remember most was how uplifting it was to feel the energy in the room from the hundreds of people whose lives he touched.

I met Jody just two months after Poppop died. Jody was also born in Massachusetts but had spent the majority of her life in the west, settling in Boise for its easy access to wide open spaces, excellent mountain biking and hiking, and its relaxed, small-city atmosphere. Jody traveled to New Bedford with me for Christmas in 2003 and was able to meet and spend time with Mamoo. In 2004, Jody and I were engaged to be married and planned our wedding for October 1, 2005, 59 years to the day after Mamoo and Poppop were married in Malone, New York.

The spring and summer before our wedding, Mamoo's health began to fade as cancer worked its way through her body. Jody and I traveled home to be with her. Seeing her was difficult as the disease had robbed her of much of her strength and vitality. It had been more than a year since I had last seen her, and I was surprised by how much she had changed.

The last time I talked to Mamoo was just a few weeks before she died. When I called, one of her nurses answered and told me that she was having trouble speaking, but that I should talk with her anyway. It was hard hearing Mamoo struggle for words, never something she had ever had difficulty with in the past. I told her that our wedding plans were progressing and that I was looking forward to seeing her the following month at a party we were planning for all of our Massachusetts family and friends who could not come to Idaho for our wedding. I told her that I loved her, and just then, clear as day, she said to me, "Oh, I love you, too, darling."

Mamoo died in July 2005, and again, Jody and I made plans to travel back to Massachusetts. Her house was eerily quiet without her big, booming voice to greet us as we walked through the door. I walked the halls, down to the big living room where we had gathered as a family so many times, and felt emptiness.

Mamoo's service, like Poppop's, was packed with friends and family. Mamoo had asked me to speak on behalf of all of her grandchildren, and when it was my turn, I was not sure if I could muster the strength. The positive energy of the congregation buoyed me. I had never spoken in front of such a large group of people, but I made it through my prepared remarks. Looking back on it now, I count it as one of the great honors of my life to have been able to share with so many people what she meant to me.

The last words that both Mamoo and Poppop ever spoke to me were "I love you."

### *Morgan* Homecoming, Part Three

As we passed by Tarpaulin Cove on the south side of Naushon Island, the crew of the *Morgan* prepared to set sail. We entered Buzzard's Bay through Quick's Hole, the narrow gap between Nashawena and Pasque Islands. We left the glassy calm of Vineyard Sound behind and as soon as choppy waters of Buzzard's Bay touched the *Morgan's* bow, the topsails, jibs, and staysails were set and the line to the tug was cast off. We were finally sailing home.

This was the exact moment I had dreamed about for as long as I could remember. The sky was overcast with a freshening breeze from the southwest, maybe not a typical Buzzard's Bay day, but close. As the *Morgan* heeled in the wind, I was struck by an emotion that's hard to describe.



It was a mix of incredible joy, nostalgia, and exhaustion that comes from only a couple of hours of sleep. The fog that obscured the horizon added a mystical, dreamlike feel.

Captain Files issued orders to steer the *Morgan* toward Round Hill, her home from 1926 to 1941, and I immediately thought of my great-grandparents, John Morgan Bullard and Catherine Crapo Bullard, who had played a role in preserving her there. I was certain that this moment would have made them both very happy. As a teenager in 1906, my great-grandfather witnessed the *Morgan's* return to Buzzard's Bay after spending 20 years whaling out of San Francisco. I imagined him standing on that same Nonquitt beach, watching us emerge through the fog, headed once again for home.

The experience of sailing on the *Morgan* was unique. It was hard to keep my bearings. First, the high bulwarks made it difficult to gain perspective unless I was leaning right up against them. It was as-if the *Morgan* was a cocoon, well suited to offshore passage-making where a clear sight of the ocean is less important, but not so much for the coastal cruising of her 38th Voyage. Second, I was so fascinated by the rig and how the crew sailed her that I spent much of my time with my eyes gazing aloft. Third, the gray overcast and haze made it difficult to make out any landmarks. I spent much of the afternoon disoriented as to our exact position and heading.

As we headed in the general direction of Round Hill, I thought of Mamoo and Poppop. I felt physically close to both of them. I was even wearing Poppop's old engineer's cap that Mamoo had given to me just after he died. The water that parted for the *Morgan's* bow had provided them immeasurable joy. A memory rushed back of Poppop teaching me the names of the various yards and sails, using his model of the *Morgan* as an example. I could not believe that I was standing on the deck of the real thing. At that moment, I felt as if they were sailing home with me.

We did not get all that close to Round Hill before Captain Files demonstrated how the *Morgan* could tack and wear (jibe). It was amazing to see how easy the crew made these complicated maneuvers look. On modern sailing vessels with fore and aft rigging, tacking and jibing is relatively easy since there are just a few lines used to move the sails from one side to the other. But the *Morgan*, as with all square rigged vessels, has what seems like hundreds of lines that need to be eased or hauled in unison just to get the ship's bow through the wind. The *Morgan*, we were told, handled remarkably well, a compliment not only to her original designers and builders, but also to the exceptional seamanship of her current captain and crew.

After several successful tacks and wears, the *Morgan* and I were finally headed for home. In the freshening breeze, the foresail, topsails, and topgallants were set along with the staysails, two jibs and the spanker. We did not sail with all sails set, as my great-grandfather had witnessed in



1906, but what we lacked in a full compliment of canvas we made up for in speed: at one point the *Morgan* made over eight knots, the fastest she sailed during the entirety of the 38th Voyage. It was as if she was in a hurry to get back to her old home port.

By this time, the spectator fleet had grown to perhaps 50 other boats and I was finally able to make out the dark outline of the tug *Jaguar* carrying my dad, step-mom, aunts, uncles, and cousins, Morgan descendants all. When they came into view alongside the *Morgan*, my dad was grinning as widely as me. He had spent many years working to preserve and revitalize New Bedford, once the epicenter of the whaling industry. The historic waterfront district that is now a National Park resulted from his many years of hard work. I could not help but think that the *Morgan's* return home was a capstone to all of his work.



But there was one last thing for me to do. I had been waiting all afternoon for a turn at the wheel and my time had finally come. I had watched Kin Howland, descendant of the whaling Howlands, take a turn at the wheel earlier in the afternoon. When his time was up, I asked him how it felt. He replied through a sly grin, “It’s been a long time since a Howland steered a whale ship.”

Steering the *Morgan* was an interesting experience. First, there’s a lot going with the crew working the ship both from the deck and from high in the rig. Second, I could not see much of anything. The wheel is surrounded by the hurricane house on both sides, there is only a small opening aft, the skylight that houses the compass is directly in front, and the mizzen mast and deck cabin almost completely obscures the view forward. But the helmsman’s only responsibility is to keep the ship pointed in the proper direction according to the compass. Steering her was much less glamorous than it sounds,



but it was still amazing to feel how responsive such a large, bulky ship was to even the smallest of turn of the wheel.

When my time at the helm was up, I made my way to the port side bulwarks. The overcast sky was giving way to blue, the fog was lifting, and we were nearing Butler's Flat lighthouse in New Bedford's outer harbor. Just as fast as it all started, it was now ending. The crew were climbing aloft to reduce and secure sail. The *Jaguar*, the tug carrying my family, was coming alongside to assist the the *Morgan* into the harbor. I wanted to see if I could make out Jody, Oliver, and my mom on the beach at Fort Taber. All day long I hoped that Jody and Oliver had made it safely off of the Vineyard in time to witness the *Morgan*'s homecoming.

As we approached the hurricane barrier that marks the entrance to New Bedford harbor, fire boats began to spray water in the air and the sirens of police boats screamed. The cannons at Fort Phoenix in Fairhaven blasted a welcome salute. There were thousands of people lining the beaches and standing on the pink stone of the hurricane barrier itself, all to witness this historic homecoming.

The *Morgan* was towed through the hurricane barrier, but with the lower topsails drawing in the fresh afternoon breeze, we still had a slight heel as we slipped through the gates and into the inner harbor. We passed historic Palmer's Island light to port and I wondered if the *Morgan* recognize her old home. The old lighthouse on Palmer's Island was there to welcome the *Morgan* home on every one of her previous voyages. Much has changed in New Bedford since she was last here, but much is still the same. The skyline still bears resemblance to the one that greeted many of the *Morgan*'s previous homecomings--the steeple of the First Unitarian Church, the waterfront textile mills, the ancient facades of the buildings of the National Park, even the rigging of the fishing fleet bears a resemblance to the masts and yards of the ships, barks, brigs, and schooners that were once common along the New Bedford waterfront.

With the *Jaguar* alongside the *Morgan*'s port quarter and the tug *Sirius* pulling from the bow, we were escorted deep into the harbor and turned toward State Pier. Ever so slowly, we inched closer to the concrete and wood structure of the pier lined with hundreds of people. Deckhands threw lines ashore, the *Jaguar*'s engines raced forward, then back. A rigid bottom inflatable boat pushed the *Morgan*'s bow at full throttle. At last, we were made fast to State Pier to the cheers of the gathered crowd. I looked out and saw Oliver waving to me from Jody's shoulders. I smiled and waved back, happy that my son, a 7th generation descendant of Charles W. Morgan, was experiencing this event.

As the crew secured additional lines and set up the companionway between the pier and the *Morgan*, I went below to retrieve my gear. During past homecomings, the *Morgan*'s hold would

have been fully laden with casks of whale oil and bone. This time, the hold was nearly empty. The 'tween decks were tidy, folding tables that had been used to serve our lunch were stacked on the starboard side, a couple of recreated whale oil casks tied up amidships, but the large, low room was otherwise empty. The fo'c's'le was tidy with voyagers' and crew's bags stuffed in their tiny bunks. I imaged how this place must have smelled during past homecomings--the stink of three years of hard living crammed into an unimaginably small space.

I brought my seabag up on deck in time for our final gathering before we were excused. Captain Files welcomed us all into a very small club: people who are alive who have sailed aboard wooden whaling ship. Steve White, the president of Mystic Seaport and one of the visionaries of this great endeavor to sail the *Morgan* back to New Bedford, spoke about how the return of the *Morgan* validated the great history of the city. We took a few last photos and then I gathered my sea bag and stepped off the *Morgan*.

With the passage to New Bedford complete, I thought of Charles W. Morgan, my fourth great-grandfather, who had sailed out of New Bedford harbor on his namesake ship on September 6, 1841, as she began her maiden whaling voyage to the Pacific. He returned to New Bedford later that afternoon by way of pilot boat, in his words, "tired, wet, and hungry." I felt as if I had closed the loop--I had helped to return his ship to New Bedford 173 years later. And like him, I was tired and hungry, but thankfully dry as a bone. The *Morgan* and I were both home.

## Home

Home for me has always been complicated. My parents divorced when I was very young. As a result, I lived with my mother and visited my father. If home is where your parents live, I had two of them. Having two homes meant that I was always in some sort of transition, either preparing to visit my dad's or preparing to come back to my mom's. I always had a bag of clothes packed and ready to go. Home became relative: it was wherever my stuff was.



Home now is Boise, Idaho, where I live with my family. It is the place Jody and I have chosen to raise our son. We love our home because of its

proximity to the great outdoors, good schools, a safe and walkable downtown, and the relaxed

western lifestyle. But home still can be as complicated as ever for me since our parents live elsewhere. Apart from the practical aspect of not having family nearby to help raise Oliver, the greater loss is the difficulty in building and maintaining those special family relationships over such a great distance. There is no substitution for time spent in the company of family and it saddens me to know that Oliver may not be able to develop the type of relationships with his grandparents as I had with mine.

Even now as an adult, coming home to New Bedford is still just as complicated as it always was. Visits home are never long enough and there is never enough time to do everything and see everyone. Visits home are even more important so that Oliver can build relationships with his grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. We are thankful for FaceTime which helps to bridge the great distance between us, but it's not enough.

I imagine this must have been a complicated homecoming for the *Charles W. Morgan*, too. Like mine, her homecoming during her 38th Voyage in the summer of 2014 was only just a short visit. But, that is how they always were. New Bedford, her old home port, is still written on her transom (to the great credit of Mystic Seaport). But she spent most of her working life at sea, away from home. Since 1941, she's called Mystic Seaport home.



Leading up to the homecoming, I read about the *Morgan's* return to New Bedford as a chance to heal the wounds caused by her departure back in 1941. The collective memory of the region, it appeared, could not let that event go, even though very few alive today were present when she last set out from New Bedford, presumably never to return. Seventy-three years had passed, and still there was resentment that New Bedford's treasured ship had somehow been taken from them. The reality, of course, is that New Bedford could not save her back then, and it was only through the efforts of Mystic Seaport that she was rescued from the fate that befell every one of her contemporaries.

Still, though, it takes a long time for wounds to heal and I've found that is best done in person. Preparations for the *Morgan's* homecoming may have temporarily opened up some of those old wounds, but her visit surely helped to close them, or at least replace the old, bitter memories with new, celebratory ones. I believe that the people of New Bedford have come to accept that the *Morgan* will never again call their city home. The *Morgan*, after all, was built to leave New

Bedford. But the *Morgan* was also built to return, and that she has done. Will she ever come home again?

My homecoming on the *Charles W. Morgan* was a breathtaking experience that allowed me to make a direct connection to my 4th great grandfather, the ship's namesake, and to experience the work of preservation and renewal that was started by my great-grandfather (and others) in the 1920's and continued by my father in the 1970s and 1980s. Sailing aboard her was everything I had dreamed. These were moments that have been burned into my memory: seeing my family emerge through the fog as we made our way across Buzzard's Bay; witnessing the outpouring of love of the people of New Bedford as their old ship came home; seeing Jody and Oliver among the crowd as we tied up to State Pier.

But the most important moments came only after I stepped off the *Charles W. Morgan*. I reconnected with my family, introduced Oliver to the people and places of my childhood, and built relationships with Jody's family that is now my family, too. I'm not certain I believe in the saying that time heals *all* wounds, but going home and making new memories, especially with the next generation, helps to nudge the more difficult events farther away into the fog of time.

Mystic Seaport and her supporters took a great risk in undertaking the 38th Voyage of the *Charles W. Morgan*. By sailing her back to her old home port, a new generation witnessed history come alive. But more importantly, a new chapter in the long and remarkable story of this luckiest of whaling ships was written. I am grateful to all of her caretakers, past and present, whose collective efforts through 174 years and counting lead to a homecoming I only ever imagined in my dreams.