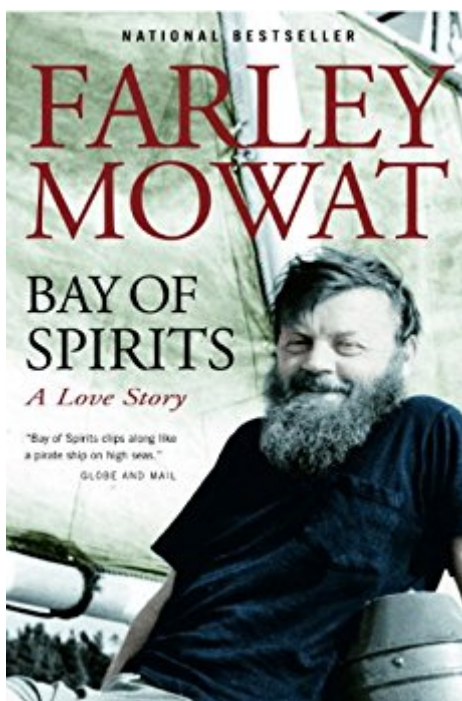


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# Bay Of Spirits: A Love Story



## Synopsis

In 1957, Farley Mowat shipped out aboard one of Newfoundland's famous coastal steamers, tramping from outport to outport along the southwest coast. The indomitable spirit of the people and the bleak beauty of the landscape would lure him back again and again over the years. In the process of falling in love with a people and a place, Mowat also met the woman who would be the great love of his life. A stunningly beautiful and talented young artist, Claire Wheeler insouciantly climbed aboard Farley's beloved but jinxed schooner as it lay on the St. Pierre docks, once again in a cradle for repairs, and changed both their lives forever. This is the story of that love affair, of summers spent sailing the Newfoundland coast, and of their decision to start their life together in Burgeo, one of the province's last remaining outports. It is also an unforgettable portrait of the last of the outport people and a way of life that had survived for centuries but was now passing forever. Affectionate, unsentimental, this is a burnished gem from an undiminished talent. I was inside my vessel painting the cabin when I heard the sounds of a scuffle nearby. I poked my head out the companionway in time to see a lithesome young woman swarming up the ladder which leaned against Happy Adventure's flank. Whining expectantly, the shipyard dog was endeavouring to follow this attractive stranger. I could see why. As slim and graceful as a ballet dancer (which, I would later learn, was one of her avocations), she appeared to be wearing a gleaming golden helmet (her own smoothly bobbed head of hair) and was as radiantly lovely as any Saxon goddess. I invited her aboard, while pushing the dog down the ladder. "That's only Blanche," I reassured my visitor. "He won't bite. He's just, uh . . . being friendly." "That's nice to know," she said sweetly. Then she smiled . . . and I was lost. "From Bay of Spirits From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Farley Mowat's notion of an idyllic day's sail more often than not involves heavy seas in shallow, rocky waters, accompanied by gale force winds, pelting rain and/or pea-soup fog, in a leaky boat with engine issues. Therefore armchair adventurers will enjoy this memoir of Mowat's 1960s love affair with "a special woman and a special world" as much as romantic sorts looking for travel among the bygone fishing villages of Newfoundland. Readers familiar with Mowat, however, will know there must be bitter with the sweet. The Newfie fishing communities, fiercely independent and attached to their way of life like limpets to a rock, were in serious decline by the 1960s. The teeming schools of fish had disappeared under the relentless onslaught of the big fishing operations and the government wanted to resettle the fishermen in factory towns, bringing Newfoundland (which had only joined Canada in 1949) squarely into the 20th century. The book opens with Mowat's harrowing and exhilarating trip aboard a 200-foot coastal steamer, one of six (now gone), which took freight and passengers to the outposts of Newfoundland, their main contact with the world. "Newfoundland is of the sea. A mighty granite stopper thrust into the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, its coasts present more than five thousand miles of rocky headlands, bays, capes, and fiords to the sweep of the Atlantic. Everywhere hidden reefs, which are called, with dreadful explicitness, sunkeners, wait to rip open the bellies of unwary vessels." Though Mowat saw little of the coast, due to foul weather and impenetrable fog, he was hooked. He bought a fish-slimed schooner, renamed it Happy Adventure and arranged to have it refitted for cruising.

Farley Mowat writes well and his material is usually interesting. I don't like his mix of the personal and the "antropologic" in this tale of adultery. I found it disingenuous that on page 79 (hardcover edition) he reveals: "Claire had to return to Toronto and her job. I was a married man...." Then a few pages later, he gives Claire's response to his phone call: "I never expected to hear your voice once we were back in Ontario. I ... was sure it could never be more than a summer romance ... when you

were a man with two small children." Well, eventually they found a way. When Mowat's wife refused him a divorce, he and Claire decided to call themselves man and wife and live "common law." It's ironic that in the chapter entitled "Seduction," Mowat tells how he reported a large suspicious vessel that refused to identify itself to the Canadian authorities, who obligingly sent a bomber to check out the vessel-- which still refused to reply--and then got the US Navy to send a destroyer to stop the vessel. The ship was the yacht of an otherwise low-profile millionaire who had skipped the paperwork and sailed into Canadian waters to do some illegal salmon fishing. Mowat waxes over the millionaire's "arrogance" in not following the legalities; Mowat makes disparaging comments on the yacht's release and accusingly mentions the great wealth of the yacht's owner as the deciding factor. Mowat's indignation is comical and ironic here. Was the yacht owner so different from Mowat, who ignored the paperwork that would make his "marriage" to Claire legal? And Mowat doesn't condemn another ship's official who refused to let him and Claire share a cabin because they didn't have a marriage license, but reversed himself when Mowat announced he wanted their fares refunded.

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