

Kayaking with Seals, Maine

Casco Bay, Maine

Story Narrative:

Submitted by Pam to the [Women Mind the Water digital stories project](#), in conjunction with the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street storytelling website and traveling exhibition "Water/Ways."

"I learned to kayak off San Juan Island in the state of Washington. I was attending a week-long program on killer whales. At the times, kayaks were made from fiberglass. I discovered it wasn't a good idea to wear shorts in a fiberglass kayak. Despite that uncomfortable start, I love kayaking! I love gliding along the surface taking in the sites and sounds of the natural world.

I've had many amazing experiences. I've kayaked in Greenland in October. In some places, the water was forming crystals. I had to dig into the hard crust to propel myself forward. In Alaska, I heard what sounded like an explosion, only to look up and see about a 1/4 of a mile away, a humpback whale breach. As it hit the water, the air shook from the sound. I've also kayaked at night among phosphorescent plankton. But, I think the best experience I've had has been in Maine. Whenever I got out in my Kayak, I look for dark brown objects bobbing on the surface. If I'm lucky and the water conditions are right, I can catch a glimpse of one. When I see it, I begin to sing, hoping my voice--so different from the deeper loud voices of a boat's engine--will attract it. Sometimes, as I paddle closer, I laugh at my silliness, especially as I realize as I near the object that instead of it being a harbor seal, I have been serenading a buoy. At low tide, rocky ledges are exposed. Some of these serve as haul out areas for seals. Recently, I came across one ledge with a group of seals. I tried to stay far enough away I wouldn't spook them, but some--probably the younger ones--nervously slid off their rocky perches into the water.

They didn't swim away. Instead, they surrounded me. They rose up until I was able to see their whiskery faces and thick necks. We were both naturally curious creatures. I floated in my kayak. They bobbed on the water. They'd disappear and resurface at a different spot. This dance went on for a while, as they slowly made their way back to the ledge. Casco Bay may be near my home in terms of mileage, but the distance that I travel when I go out in my kayak is immeasurable. I am transported to another world. My spirit, no matter how low it has been, is lifted. I feel so lucky to live in Maine."

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