

The Boat Who Wouldn't Float Study Guide

The Boat Who Wouldn't Float by Farley Mowat

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Plot Summary

The Boat Who Wouldn't Float by Farley Mowat is a book of non-fiction detailing the author's fascinating and humorous journey across Canada and his stay in various parts of Newfoundland while trying to live the dream of becoming a sailor. The book begins with Mowat describing his fear of auctions. As a small boy, Mowat witnesses his father getting carried away at an auction and ended up buying thirty hives of bees and the rest of the equipment so that he could start an apiary. The strange thing was the Mowat's father did not particularly want an apiary. Instead, he just simply gets carried away. Many years later, the same thing happens to Mowat. Although the author has successfully avoided auctions for many years, he ends up at one with a girlfriend. Mowat buys and buys. Suddenly, the author is in possession of a large amount of equipment belonging to a recently deceased chandler. Mowat is destined to become a sailor, just as his father becomes a highly unsuccessful beekeeper.

Mowat meets up with Jack McClelland, a friend and publisher in Toronto. The two men drink and discuss the boat. Soon, the two men are planning to take a trip around Newfoundland the old fashioned way.

The way the story is written, it seems that Farley Mowat is born with saltwater in his veins or at least the author would like the reader to think so. Mowat is disillusioned with his life when he decides to become the skipper of a sad little schooner that he eventually names Happy Adventure. The eight-year long adventure is co-sponsored by Mowat's friend, Jack McClelland. Both men are veterans and continues to harbor a longing for the sea.

The procurement of the boat is in itself an adventure. After a great deal of time, money, and determination, Mowat prepares for McClelland's arrival in a little village known as Muddy Hole.

The boat is in bad shape and supplies are scarce. The men learn a great deal about boats and what it will take to prepare Happy Adventure for sea. There is a tremendous amount of work, time, effort, and money before the men can get out onto the ocean. The series of mishaps often stall the men but the show is meant to go on.

The story takes place over the course of eight years. The Boat Who Wouldn't Float certainly comes by her name honestly as she sinks more often than not. However, she receives a great deal of love, a celebration at Expo 67, and offers a lifetime of experiences to her owners.

It is easy to see why Mowat loves the open sea. Mowat's idealism comes through loud and clear as he sets sail. Even as the Happy Adventure meets one mishap after another, Mowat's love never wanes.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 1, "Conception," Mowat begins by describing his fear of auctions. As a small boy, Mowat witnesses his father getting carried away at an auction and ended up buying thirty hives of bees and the rest of the equipment so that he could start an apiary. The strange thing was the Mowat's father did not particularly want an apiary. Instead, he just simply gets carried away. Many years later, the same thing happens to Mowat. Although the author has successfully avoided auctions for many years, he ends up at one with a girlfriend. Mowat buys and buys. Suddenly, the author is in possession of a large amount of equipment belonging to a recently deceased chandler. Mowat is destined to become a sailor, just as his father becomes a highly unsuccessful beekeeper.

Mowat talks about Jack McClelland, a friend and publisher, who sat alongside him in a Toronto bar one night. The two men drink and discuss the boat. Soon, the two men are planning to take a trip around Newfoundland the old fashioned way.

The only place that the men can think to buy a suitable boat at the right price is in Newfoundland. In May, Mowat takes off for St. John's where he meets with Harold Hardwood. Mowat refers to Hardwood as "a red-bearded, coldly blue-eyed iconoclast...who was reputed to know more about Newfoundland's scattered little outport villages than any living man" (Chapter 1, pg. 5.)

Despite the fact that Mowat is a mainlander, Harold agrees to help Mowat find a boat. Although it seems like a nice gesture, Mowat is about to find out that there is going to be great amusement in it for Harold.

The biggest obstacle for buying a boat on the island is the price. Mowat has one thousand dollars to spend on the craft but quickly finds out that some boats are too expensive or not for sale. Others that fit the budget are not seaworthy. After two days, Harold comes through with a small boat owned by the Hallohan brothers. Mowat's tale is funny because he buys a boat without even being able to see it clearly. The brothers who he buys the boat from, turn out to be excellent salesmen. The owners take Mowat to the boat but it is too foggy to see anything but the color, which is a hideous green. Mowat ends up getting drunk and hands over the money. For better or worse, Mowat buys a Southern Shore bummer.

Mowat discovers that the unnamed boat is in need of major repairs and after searching around Muddy Hole, he finds someone who can make the changes. The man nearly chokes when he hears how much Mowat has paid for the boat. The man tells Mowat that he builds the boat for the Hallohans for \$200. The repairs and changes will take a lot of time to put into motion. Although Mowat is impatient, there will be months to wait, dream, and plan.



Chapter 2, "Passion Flower" Goes to Sea," begins with the Mowat talking about the fact that Jack McClelland still owns a surrogate ship. Mowat is not to be outdone and refers to his own vessel as the Passion Flower, which is actually a decrepit Jeep station wagon. Mowat however is very proud of the Passion Flower and is determined to make her appear as authentic as possible by adding running lights, a winch, and her own motto. Mowat tells the story of how the Passion Flower "sails" from Toronto to Newfoundland. In addition to these accessories, Mowat adds two anchors, three cases of biscuits along with coils of cordage, cork life preservers, boils of sailcloth, a compass, a patent log, and many other articles. While the objects are heavy and burdensome, Mowat is able to justify taking them on the trip across country.

Since the journey is long, Mowat has to spend the night while on the road. One night, Mowat picks a safe spot to camp. He wakes up to the smell of food and a stranger cooking breakfast using his supplies. Mowat is not upset as the man, whose name is Wilbur, turns out to be a seaman in Newfoundland. All seamen know that if they approach another vessel, they will be welcomed aboard. In that tradition, Mowat invites Wilbur to travel with him to St. John's. Mowat describes Wilbur's adventures at sea and his unusual character. Mowat says, "Wilbur was an acquisition. He had been at sea nearly 40 years - or so he said. As we ran eastward that morning along the banks of the mighty river, he pointed to many passing ships and told me stories of their crews, stories which, did I dare to repeat them in print, would make Henry Miller sound like a purveyor of Victorian nursery rhymes" (Chapter 2, pg. 16.)

Exhausted from all the driving, Mowat allows Wilbur to drive the Passion Flower. The decision however turns out to be a mistake as Wilbur crashes the Passion Flower only a few feet away from the starting point.

Mowat talks about Nova Scotians and the loss of their heritage. The trip continues without much more excitement. Most of the text has to do with the scenery along the way. Mowat repeats a passage from another book in which he describes Newfoundland.

The Passion Flower eventually moors at Port aux Basques in St. John's. The trip has been 550 miles long and exhausting for Mowat. Once in St. John's, Mowat learns that Wilbur is actually a patient at the St. John's mental hospital and has been for nearly 20 years. Wilbur has never posed any trouble at the hospital but every once in a while, he would escape so that he could take one more voyage. The chapter ends with Wilbur thanking Mowat and telling him to call anytime that he needs a crew member. Mowat claims that he just might do that as Wilbur is one of the best traveling companions and crew members he has had thus far.

Chapter 3, "The Sea-Green Bride," begins with Mowat talking about his fondness for Newfoundland. Although Mowat is quite fond of Newfoundland, he does not have any great love for St. John's, the capital city. According to Mowat St. John's is a parasite, a city that has only succeeded by feeding on the life blood of outport people. Mowat talks about the recent history of Newfoundland and how it has evolved since the arrival of the English fleets.



Mowat does not stay in the city very long but chooses to head south. By dawn, the Passion Flower reaches the fishing village of Muddy Hole and the temporary home of the new boat. Mowat is disappointed to find that the boat is not waiting for him as he had expected. Mowat goes looking for Enos so that he can locate the boat and see the progress of the repairs that are supposed to be completed in his absence. Mowat finally finds the boat only to realize that it has not been touched since he has last seen it. None of the work has been done. Enos does not seem worried and assures Mowat that the work will be completed. Mowat however is utterly furious and worried about the fact that McClelland is due to arrive in two weeks. As a man who gets things done, McClelland is not patient with people who are inefficient.

Enos Coffin's seven daughters find Mowat sound asleep in the Passion Flower. The daughters take care of Mowat, pampering him and cooking great meals as well as supplying drink and being hospitable. Once again, Enos seems unconcerned about the delay in finishing the boat and promises to have it done right away. Mowat knows that there is no way that the boat can be ready by the time McClelland arrived from Toronto.

Chapter 4 "Farillon and Ferryland," begins with Mowat's hellish days spent in Muddy Hole. Mowat talks about the fact that everybody knows him in Ferryland and their familiarity makes Mowat appreciate the hospitality of the Newfoundlanders. Howard Morry is one of the villagers that is incredibly kind to Mowat and shares his life story with the would-be sailor. Mowat talks about Farillon, how it used to be an English settlement, and how it evolves into a present-day port. Morry takes good care of Mowat and shows him around the area. The author also includes some of Morry's tales and details an expedition involving trapping cod on Bois Island.

Chapter 5, "Corsets, Cod, and Constipation," begins with the arrival of McClelland from Toronto. Mowat is ambivalent about McClelland's appearance considering the state of the boat. Once Mowat gets to the airport, he is informed that no planes are coming in from Toronto and that the airport will be fogged in for no less than a week. Since there are no phones at Muddy Hole, Mowat will have no way of knowing when McClelland will arrive. Mowat talks about the difference between traveling by rail and traveling by plane and which will be the best for McClelland. McClelland eventually decides to make the drive in a brand-new red convertible, the sight of which completely amazes the inhabitants at Muddy Hole. When McClelland arrives, he mistakes the waving crowd of people as a warm greeting by the people of Muddy Hole when it is in fact a warning that there is no road. McClelland realizes the problem too late and cannot keep the car from crashing into a sheep shed.

Enos and McClelland meet for the first time. Mowat is amused when McClelland learns that there are little to no conveniences at Muddy Hole. McClelland comes from a Toronto family and a life of private schools. He is very used to conveniences and hence their absence in Muddy Hole is just another part of the culture shock experienced by the city dweller. There is going to be a lot of adjustment on McClelland's part if he is going to stay in Muddy Hole until the boat is ready.



Chapters 6-9

Chapters 6-9 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 6, "A Pounce of Pirates," McClelland decides that things are moving much too slowly and that the team is in need of some major reorganization. McClelland is the perfect man for the job. The others remain quiet after hearing McClelland's plans. The first thing is that the daily trips to St. John's are completely unnecessary. The crew should be able to pick up most things in perhaps one trip a week. The others are eager to let McClelland try the new plan. It is not long however before McClelland realizes why daily trips were necessary. The merchants in St. John's have no need or desire for money. Sales clerks often hide or run away when someone would try to buy something. After a full day of going from place to place, the only thing McClelland manages to get was a parking ticket.

The crew is forced to improvise because of the lack of goods and tools. They do this quite well. One saving grace is that Obie has relatives on the Southern Shore who will be willing to sell some of the necessary items for the boat's repair. The journey to the Southern Shore is difficult as there is no road most of the way. Once at their destination, Obie is needed to translate the strange language used by his kin. The trip is worthwhile as the men return to Muddy Hole with the items they so desperately need. Among those items is a case of rum. McClelland quickly learns that putting out an entire case of rum is extremely foolish as it disappears by the end of the afternoon. The purchase works in McClelland and Mowat's favor, however. After sampling a good portion of the rum, Obie ends up falling overboard. The men of the village, who have been previously unwilling to help McClelland and Mowat, leave work early to run to Obie's aid, making quick work of the repairs. As predicted, the case of rum is gone by the end of the day. The crew is in such fine spirits that Enos decides to go into the woods to hunt for caribou. Although no one has been in the area for almost 50 years, Enos is soon on his way. The man ends up getting lost in his own backyard and finally stumbles home the next day, practically blind without his glasses. The author tells a humorous story of paying neighborhood children to find Enos' glasses, which somehow ends up in a tree ten feet off the ground.

Chapter 7, "Full Speed Astern," begins with Mowat and McClelland moving onboard their boat. McClelland states that it is traditional to stay aboard one's boat; although the truth is that he is unnerved by Enos' seven daughters. Enos works steadily on the boat preparing the various compartments, including the sleeping quarters. Despite Mowat's protests, Enos insists on building extremely cramped quarters in the traditional style. In the end, Enos will not compromise with Mowat. The only room on the boat designed for any kind of comfort is the engine room. Mowat refers to Enos' design as "diabolically efficient."

The men work day and night to get the boat out on the water. The villagers warm up to McClelland and Mowat and begin to bring the men food to eat. Unfortunately, the only food they bring is cod. The men eat cod for every meal and desperately begin to look for



other ways to prepare or get rid of it. There is no way to throw it overboard without being caught and hurting the feelings of the villagers. Eventually, Enos teaches them how to cure and store the cod for future use.

The July date originally set for the launch is beginning to seem feasible. On one trip to visit Howard Morry, McClelland learns about the 17th century pirate Peter Easton. McClelland becomes obsessed with the gentlemanly thief and insists that the boat is named after Easton's flagship, Happy Adventure. The name will turn out to be more than a little ironic.

Chapter 8, "The Old Man Earns His Drink," begins with the men putting Enos in charge as captain. The main reason for this is that the Happy Adventure has no radar, no charts of eastern Newfoundland, and a misguided compass. Enos knows the waters as well as his own name and is therefore the logical choice. Enos declines but McClelland has a plan. After tricking Enos onto the crew as sailing master, the little boat heads to Trespassey on the southeastern tip. Almost immediately there are problems and the boat begins to take on water. McClelland is convinced that the boat does not want to sail. Mowat said she is just new to the game and does not know what is expected of her. The boat manages to make it to shore where it takes six days to complete necessary repairs before the Happy Adventure can set sail again.

After a horrific night ashore, Enos decided that it is time for him to return to Muddy Hole. Mowat does not dissuade the man from leaving.

Chapter 9, "T' Place Where t' Fog is Made," begins with a description of Trespassey. It is described as a desolate little village with wooden houses staggered on the edge of a harbor. According to natives in other parts of Newfoundland, Trespassey is referred to as "T' Place Where t' Fog is Made." Mowat says that he believes the saying. After being in a harbor for nearly a week, the men decide that there is no point in trying to wait for good weather. The fog obscures the view of the sewage pipe which is blocked by the boat moored near a busy fishing plant. The men learn this when the sewage shoots across the deck of the Happy Adventure. Mowat and McClelland are asked to relocate the Happy Adventure to a government wharf nearby.

Mowat and McClelland meet the crew of another boat, Jeannie Barnes, moored at the same wharf. There has to be something done about the constant repairs on the boat. Mowat decides to call upon Mike Donovan, an old friend from World War II and Newfoundland's Director of Provincial Library Services. Donovan has a reputation for being clever and Mowat thinks that he might be able to help with the problems faced by the beleaguered Happy Adventure.



Chapters 10-13

Chapters 10-13 Summary and Analysis

The Happy Adventure and her crew spend five days ashore while waiting for good weather. During this time, the men realize that their previous dreams of sailing the Atlantic are more than a bit unrealistic. Mowat says, "We had given up on our original intention of sailing to the tropics because it was clear from a scrutiny of our log that, even if we maintained our current rate of progress, it would take us sixteen months to reach the Caribbean, twenty-nine months to reach the Azores, and seven and a half years to reach the South Pacific. We did not have that much time" (Chapter 10, pg. 95.)

Instead, the men settle on the nearby island of St. Pierre. Although the island is not everything the entire trip could be, it makes up for some of the disappointment. The island is foreign soil as it flies a French flag. It also has the largest and cheapest amounts of alcohol in North America. Perhaps best of all, the Happy Adventure can surely reach the island before winter sets in.

On the way to St. Pierre, the fog becomes so thick that Mowat wants to turn back. McClelland will not hear of it. The boat nears St. Shotts, which horrifies Mowat, reminding him of the trip he had taken there by land. Mowat gives the impression that he would rather drown than ever step foot on the island again. Eventually, the men come across a large schooner. The skipper inform the men that they are nine points off course and that they will never reach St. Pierre the way they are going. Then it goes from bad to worse.

The Happy Adventure has more mechanical problems. The exhaust stack is damaged, the engine is uncooperative at best, making strange noises and then running even when it is turned off. The fog continues to be as thick as pea soup, the compass is not even close to being correct, and a tropical storm is on the horizon. The boat is stuck, lost, and completely helpless.

The storm holds off and somehow the Happy Adventure makes it to the Burin Inlet where Mowat and McClelland can finally drop anchor and get some much needed rest.

Chapter 11, "The Boys of Burin," begins with Mowat waking up with a sense of unease. It is a beautiful sunny day. The Burin Inlet is filled with boats of all sizes as well as people gaily dressed for church. A man approaches the Happy Adventure and congratulates the men on bringing the boat into the inlet in such a black and dense fog. The man seem surprised that anyone would attempt to travel in such fog, let alone make it to shore in one piece. The man did not want to board the Happy Adventure but does not state why he refused. Maybe it is the untidy appearance of Mowat and McClelland or the sorry state of the Happy Adventure.



The man invites the sailors to Sunday dinner and will not hear of it when they decline on account of their filthy appearance. The man insists and says that his wife would be expecting them. Their appearance makes no difference.

Once in Burin, McClelland skips the dinner and takes advantage of the one phone in Burin. As one might expect, McClelland is bombarded with work problems when he checks in with his office. As a result, McClelland is called back to Toronto on business and is forced to leave immediately. McClelland can easily get transportation back to St. John's to catch the next available flight. Mowat wants to go with him but McClelland refuses, saying that Mowat needs to go on without him. Somehow McClelland convinces Mike Donovan to come aboard until he can return.

During the next weeks, Mowat is treated as somewhat of a celebrity in Burin. He is fed by every family, brought into their homes, and encouraged to share endless, delightful tales. A small band of boys become followers of Mowat's and help out on the Happy Adventure. By the end of the stay, the boat is repainted and appears glistening and cleaner than it ever has been. When Mike Donovan arrives, he is treated to the same island hospitality.

Mowat describes Donovan as a most amiable man, although he is by no means a mariner. Donovan gets away by claiming to start a library in the southwest and brings trunks of books to prove it. However, these books will have to stay on the island lest they sink the little boat.

Although Mowat is not Catholic like Donovan, he becomes grateful for Donovan's large St. Christopher medal as it, and perhaps the Old Man of the Sea, are surely there to protect them from what is about to come.

Chapter 12, "A Basking Shark and a Basque Proposal," begins with the Happy Adventure setting sail for St. Pierre.

The boat is finally on its way to St. Pierre. Among the sea creatures seen by Mowat and Donovan are various types of whales. Donovan is thrilled with the site. Mowat says, "Mike had recently reread Moby Dick and he was fired by a desire to experience the passions of a whaler" (Chapter 12, pg. 122.)

The men spot a creature basking in the sun. It is thought to be another whale. Mowat decide to get a closer look and inform Donovan who is at the tiller. The only problem is that steering the boat is a new experience for Donovan and he is still getting used to it. As the men draw closer, they notice that their "whale" is actually a shark. Donovan gets confused about steering the boat, most likely because of the excitement of seeing a shark and actually runs the boat into the shark. The Happy Adventure starts to leak again. It somehow rights itself and all is well.

The Happy Adventure lands in St. Pierre. Mowat is thrilled. On the island is Theo, an old friend. It is not until they land on St. Pierre that Mowat realizes that he has been sailing illegally. The boat has no papers or legal markings, and is not registered. The oversight could result in the boat being impounded and the crew thrown into jail. With Theo's help,



they decide to rename the boat a Basque ship, claiming St. Pierre as her home. The crisis is thus narrowly averted.

Chapter 13, "With Soul So Pure," details Mowat's stay on St. Pierre. It is better than he can ever have imagined. The islanders are very hospitable toward the crew. On island, Mowat meets Paulo, a man who will be able to help with any necessary repairs and adornments for the Happy Adventure. Paulo is a cheerful fellow that speaks a combination of French and atrocious English which adds to the comedy. It is through Paulo that Mowat has the opportunity to meet Blanche. Blanche is a rare breed of water dog that can only be found in places like St. Pierre. Although Blanche seems lazy, the tale of her importance enthralls Mowat. Blanche lays about the wharf until a whistle is blown. At the sound of the whistle, Blanche jumps up and gallops into action. The dog, plus many others, dives into the freezing water to collect hardwood wedges that are floating in the water. The other four dogs that accompany Blanche are not entirely willing but Blanche is a cruel taskmaster. Paulo explains that before Blanche comes along, men would have to jump into the water to remove the wedges and to keep them from interfering with the launch. Not long after Blanche assumes the duties, she begins to train other dogs on the island to work for her. Mowat can see that Blanche is a brilliant as Paulo claims.

Plans for the rechristening of the Happy Adventure continue as does Paulo's efforts to help the men out. One present left by Paulo is a box full of large Newfoundland crabs that take up residence in the boat's engine room, creating yet another fiasco.



Chapters 14-17

Chapters 14-17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 14, "Itchy-ass-sally," begins with Mowat and Donovan being awakened in the very early hours by Paulo. It is time to rechristen the ship. Also present are Theo, his sons, and the Father. The ceremony is rather short and odd as the Father is ill and ends up sneezing holy water all over the inside of the cabin. The boat is renamed by the Father as Itchatchozale Alai. Although the men practice saying the name over and over again, no one can ever get it right. Donovan dubs her "Itchy-ass-sally" much to Mowat's dismay.

There are huge celebrations all over the island, from a party aboard ship to a feast at L'Escal. When even the Basques cannot pronounce the boat's new moniker, she simply becomes known as "Itchy."

Part of the deal with renaming Itchy is that she would have to change her appearance to properly represent the Basque merchant maritime. The author details the great efforts to make Itchy look like a true Basque ship, complete with black and gold paint, and vows that she would not set sail again until the bullgine had been fixed once and for all.

Chapter 15, "Voyage of the 'Oregon'," is a long tale of the history of the Oregon, a ship named after a World War II passenger ship. The boat, filled with refugees, is nearly shredded upon rocks until it is signaled and diverted by Theo as he makes the rounds in his Dory.

This chapter also makes the first reference to Claire. It is not explained at first that Claire is Mowat's wife. The couple had been invited aboard the ship for a tour.

Chapter 16, "The Game is Played," details the "game" often participated in by the islanders. Transporting alcohol in any form is illegal. There are spies in the gendarmes on the island that will report to French officers out on international waters if anyone attempts to smuggle alcohol for possible sale to the other islands or ports. Naturally, Mowat and Donovan have to get in on the action.

Chapter 17, "Westward No!," tells of the return to St. Pierre and Donovan's sad return to St. John's. Donovan does keep his word and founds many libraries along various ports. Mowat stays in St. Pierre for a week. Mowat toys with the idea of sailing on but knows it is now hurricane season and that it will soon be winter. Itchy is left to Paulo, Theo, and Martin for the winter. Mowat will begin again next spring. Unfortunately, McClelland will not be able to join him.

In this chapter, Mowat does refer to Claire as being an able and pretty member of the crew in St. Pierre.



The islanders keep in touch with Mowat through the winter. When Mowat returns to St. Pierre, he cannot find any sign of his friends. Mowat learns of Itchy's condition from Ella at L'Escal and flies to the marina to see his little boat that is badly damaged. None of the men can be found. It turns out that by leaving all three in charge of Itchy, Mowat causes a problem. Since no one has sole command, there is an argument and as a result no one cares for Itchy. It is only the mention of Itchy's insurance policy that men foist her out of the water in hopes of being repaired. It takes six weeks to make repairs.

New amenities are added to Itchy, including facilities, after Claire falls overboard when attempting to relieve herself. The wet conditions begin to take their toll as well, with everything covered in mold. Naturally there are many more problems, including issues with a new gearbox.

The summer is spent in lovely places. Itchy is renamed Happy Adventure. Although Mowat makes many attempts to sail west, the boat will not hear of it. Any trips in any other direction goes beautifully. Any trip west is disastrous. Mowat says that she is content until spring 1967.



Chapters 18-21

Chapters 18-21 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 18, "Goodbye Messers," tells of Canada's Centennial, 100 years since the incorporation of the Act of Confederation. The people in Burgeo are confused, believing that the Confederation occurred in 1949. One of the people is quoted as saying, "A centennial is supposed to be one hunnert year. 1949 to 1967 be more like eighteen year. Anyway 'tis nowhere nigh a hunnert. They fellows on the mainland must be some short on larnin" (Chapter 18, pg. 195.)

Nonetheless, Expo 67 is supposed to be the biggest celebration ever witnessed in North America and perhaps the world. Claire suggests that the Happy Adventure should sail to the Expo. Mowat takes a while to become convinced. Naturally, she sinks. Remembering Enos' words, Mowat sails in fits and starts until the boat stops leaking. Maybe the boat will agree to go after all or then again, maybe not.

Chapter 19, "The Alien Shore," begins with the Happy Adventure leaving the Burgeo Islands. Soon, the boat begins to leak. Since Mowat feels that he made complete fool of himself at the boat's departure, he does not feel that they can return. The boat presses on despite the increasing amount of fiascos that occur by the minute. Mowat is ready to give up. The next morning, the sun shines and the boat ceases to leak. Apparently Mowat is not meant to abandon the voyage despite his secret plans the previous night. There are trips to alien shores and a return to Port aux Basques. By the end of the detour, the Happy Adventure has taken on so much mud that there is no way she could leak.

Chapter 20, "Hello Expo!," picks up in August, with tales of rich men's yachts, a perfect replica of Joshua Slocum's Spray, and similar world traveling vessels. Mowat talks about Cape Breton and Isle Madame and their history. Mowat also tells of the bridge that one must pass between the two places. The bridge is operated by horsepower. If the horse is not present or does not like you or the noises one makes, the horse will refuse to raise the bridge. It does not matter who you are, as the president of a large company learns the hard way.

At Pictou, McClelland rejoins the Happy Adventure. He will only have a week to spare which means that he will have to sail day and night to reach the Expo. McClelland has a horrible time during the trip as the boat is surrounded by lobsters at one point. Being violently allergic to all shellfish, McClelland cannot escape.

The rest of the trip to the Expo is filled with the usual problems. Mowat often feels beaten but McClelland will not hear of quitting at this point in the game. The boat finally does make it to the Expo only to be approached rapidly by the Blue Heron. The Happy Adventure is sailing without the required numbers painted on her hull and is flying a Basque flag instead of a Canadian one. As Mowat gives in to despair, it turns out that



the boat is sent not to haul them all to jail but to celebrate the little boat's voyage. It is a wild celebration for the boat who would not float.

Chapter 21, "Envoi," begins with the Happy Adventure taking on water once more. Apparently, the celebration is over. As has happened several times before, the boat simply stops leaking two hours out. Mowat sailsher to Port Hope in Ontario, where he and Claire had purchased a house.

At long last, Mowat decides that it is time to quit. Mowat tells the local shipyard master to tear apart the boat, take anything useful, and simply let her die. The shipyard master cannot do it however. In the spring, the shipyard master launches the Happy Adventure and reports that she has not leaked a drop. Mowat realizes that he cannot leave her to die in this foreign and populated place. In a fit of guilt, Mowat promises to take the Happy Adventure home where she belongs.



Characters

Farley Mowat

Farley Mowat (1921-present) is a Canadian sailor, conservationist, environmentalist, and bestselling author. Mowat is known for his non-fiction work, which often contains humorous anecdotes of his childhood in Saskatchewan, adventures with animals, and of course, descriptions of the sea.

Mowat spends several years in military service abroad before returning to Canada. Mowat attends university in Toronto where he studies biology and becomes interested in the history and conservation issues of the Great White North. Mowat publishes his first book, "People of the Deer," a call to arms on behalf of the Inuit people. The success of the book leads to many others, allowing Mowat to explore various issues largely ignored by the general public.

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Jack McClelland

Jack McClelland is a publisher and friend to Mowat. The author refers to McClelland as a romantic although McClelland denies it. McClelland is taken by the magic allure of the boat as well and before either man knows it, they are planning to take a trip around Newfoundland the old fashioned way.

McClelland had served as a skipper of Motor Torpedo Boats (MTBs) and other small craft during the war. Although McClelland does return to civilian life after serving in the military, there is a part of the man that still craves the sea. Mowat tells of McClelland's experiences on the bridge of an MTB while it fires at German E-boats.

In general, McClelland is an organized businessman who is up for an adventure but wants to do it in the most logical and efficient way. McClelland quickly finds out that the procurement of the boat and the preparation for sailing is anything but logical and efficient. Of course, this drives the man crazy. Still, people whom Mowat refers to as "the Golden People" seem to respect McClelland. The people in turn consider



McClelland as "A Man Who Gets Things Done." Together, McClelland and Mowat learn more about sailing than they ever think they will need to know, only enriching the already outlandish voyage.

Enos Coffin

Enos Coffin is a ship's chandler from Muddy Hole. Enos is in charge of repairing the Happy Adventure for Mowat and McClelland.

Obie

Obie helps Enos. He is large and strong man who often accompanies Mowat on various errands.

Hallohan Brothers

The Hallohan brothers, Mike and Paddy, sell the Happy Adventure to Mowat.

Wilbur

Wilbur is an escaped mental patient who hooks up with Mowat on the road to St. John's.

Harold Hardwood

Harold Hardwood is a resident of Muddy Hole. Hardwood is one of the few who will work with Mowat.

Morry Family

The Morry family is kind to Mowat and teaches him a lot about the culture and traditions of the Newfoundlanders.

Claire Mowat

Claire Mowat is Farley Mowat's wife and occasional travel companion.

Theophile

Theophile is an old friend of Mowat's and cherished companion on St. Pierre.

Paulo

Paulo is a man on St. Pierre that often helps Mowat work on the Happy Adventure.



Objects/Places

Newfoundland

Mowat talks about his fondness for Newfoundland but not for St. John's as a capital city. While Newfoundland itself has a lovely physical presence and a rich cast of characters as its inhabitants, Mowat does not think highly of St. John's. According to Mowat, St. John's is a parasite and a city that has only succeeded by feeding on the life blood of outport people. Mowat describes the recent history of Newfoundland. In the 1960s, during the time of Mowat's voyage, St. John's makes itself rich by taking advantage of the outport people by charging whatever exorbitant fees they deem fair, bleeding the fishermen of hard-earned money. Mowat states that in the 1960s, St. John's boasts more millionaires per capita than any city in the Americas, including the oil rich lands of Dallas, Texas.

Newfoundland is settled by people from Ireland, England, and France looking for a better life for themselves. Once the men arrive in St. John's, they are often taken advantage of by the planters and treated as slaves. Like slaves, the newly landed immigrants revolt and forge nests for themselves in the interior, making use of the vast number of inlets and bays from which they can catch fish and support their families. As a result, many of those people remain protective and cold to outsiders, particularly those they refer to as "mainlanders."

Happy Adventure

Happy Adventure is the name of the boat procured by Farley Mowat for his journey on the Atlantic. The boat is not exactly what Mowat or McClelland have counted on. However, Mowat is taken in by the cunning Newfoundlanders and the brothers Hallohan who are portrayed as pirates.

At first, the biggest obstacle in finding the right boat is the price. Mowat has one thousand dollars to spend on the craft. Some boats are too expensive or not for sale. Others that fit the budget are not seaworthy. After two days, Harold comes through with a jack boat owned by the Hallohan brothers. Mowat's tale is funny in that he ends up buying a boat more or less unseen. The owners take Mowat to the boat but it is too foggy to see anything but the color. Mowat ends up getting drunk and handed over the money. For better or worse, Mowat buys a Southern Shore bummer.

Mowat discovers that the unnamed boat is in need of major repairs and finds someone who can make the changes. The man tells Mowat that he built the boat for the Hallohans for \$200.

Mowat decides to stick with the sad little schooner and makes every attempt to repair and refit her so that she would be safe to sail. Although Mowat will succeed to an extent,



Happy Adventure seems to want nothing to do with the ocean. The boat seems to only be interested in returning home to her little harbor in Muddy Hole.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia is a heavily populated Canadian province on the southeastern tip of the country. The province's capital, Halifax, is famous for its economic structure. The province is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and features many inlets and bays.

Toronto

Toronto is home to Mowat and McClelland. It is also the place where the men get together and made the initial plans for their journey.

St. John's

St. John's is the capital city of Newfoundland. The city is wealthy due to its affiliation with maritime activities.

Passion Flower

Passion Flower is an old Jeep station wagon used by Mowat to haul gear to St. John's from Toronto.

Coffin Home

The Coffin home is Mowat's first port of call in Muddy Hole. The house is inhabited by Mowat's chandler, Enos, and his seven daughters.

Oregon

The Oregon is a dory used during World War II. Mowat takes a journey aboard the old ship with Claire.

Burin Island

Burin Island is one of the ports visited by Mowat and the Happy Adventure on their journey.



Themes

Sailing

Farley Mowat seems to have been born with saltwater in his veins or at least the author would like to think so. Mowat is disillusioned with his life when he decides to become the skipper of a sad little schooner eventually named Happy Adventure. The eight-year long adventure is co-sponsored by Mowat's friend, Jack McClelland. Both men are veterans and continue to harbor a longing for the sea.

Apart from a brief mention in the beginning of the book of the men and their experiences with MTBs, it does not seem that sailing is a hobby or lifelong passion for either man. Following in his father's footsteps, Mowat is overtaken by the idea of sailing the Atlantic and the dream seems to follow the obsession, just as Mowat's partnership with McClelland follows a stint in a Toronto bar.

The men learn a great deal about boats and what it will take to prepare Happy Adventure for sea. There will be a tremendous amount of work, time, effort, and money before the men can get out onto the ocean. The series of mishaps often stall the men but the show is meant to go on.

It is easy to see why Mowat loves the open sea. Mowat's idealism comes through loud and clear as he set sail. Even as the Happy Adventure meet one mishap after another, Mowat's love never wanes.

Newfoundland

Farley Mowat moves to Newfoundland and spends eight years there while preparing and sailing the Happy Adventure.

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number of inlets and bays from which they can catch fish and support their families. As a result, many of those people remain protective and cold to outsiders, particularly those they refer to as "mainlanders."

Determination

Skipper Farley Mowat shows a great deal of determination in forging ahead with plans to sail the Atlantic despite the numerous pitfalls, mishaps, and delays in his plans. Although comical, the details surrounding Mowat and McClelland's experiences with the Newfoundlanders and their ways show how determined the men were to set sail, particularly when so many obstacles stand in the way.

Mowat is an easy target for the Hallohan brothers who sell him the 30-foot schooner in a dense fog and then get Mowat drunk enough to part with his money. The extensive repairs necessary to make the Happy Adventure seaworthy are incredibly daunting. If Mowat did not have McClelland to answer to, the reader is left to wonder if the man would have continued as planned or simply cut his losses and returned to Toronto.

The efforts made by Enos, Obie and others result in the complete rebuilding of the boat from the hull up. The author describes his efforts, the extreme difficulty in obtaining necessary tools and items, the time it takes to rebuild the ship, and the specifications of the refurbished boat and its components in detail.

The need for staunch determination continues long after the boat sets sail and faces leaks, foul weather and other mishaps.

Style

Perspective

"The Boat Who Wouldn't Float" by Farley Mowat is a book of non-fiction, detailing the author's foray into the world of sailing and seacraft.

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Tone

"The Boat Who Wouldn't Float" by Farley Mowat has a unique tone for a memoir. Mowat is well known for being an avid and competent sailor, albeit one who has given up sailing to become a dirt farmer. The book reflects that same tone without being overpowering or biased to the point of being viewed as the work of a zealot who has devoted his entire life to virtually every aspect of the sea.

Since this is a work of non-fiction and therefore relies on the perspective of the author, Mowat is able to present many facts objectively. The overall tone is one of a man who decided to explore a renewed passion for sailing and one who is willing to do whatever is needed to be done to get the Happy Adventure out on the waters of the Atlantic.

In the beginning of the book, Mowat often comes across as being somewhat lost and unsure of himself. The author has had enough of dirt farming and finds fate when attending an auction with a girlfriend. As the book progresses, the reader can see how Mowat progresses as well and begins to develop the voice which turns him from an enterprising sailor into a man of the sea.

Part of the tone and effectiveness of Mowat's work comes from the firsthand experiences in Newfoundland. The author is popular for his rich sense of humor and characterizations, both of which serve to make the book a delightful read.

Structure

"The Boat Who Wouldn't Float" by Captain Farley Mowat is a work of non-fiction. It is comprised of 241 pages broken down into 21 chapters. The shortest chapter is comprised of 8 pages; the longest chapter is comprised of 16 pages; the average number of pages per chapter is 11. In addition to the 21 chapters, there is an illustration of the area frequented by Mowat and McClelland during their time in Newfoundland..

Overall the book is written in chronological order. There is some mention of Mowat's childhood in Chapter 1, but the majority of the book is devoted to the procuring, rebuilding, and unsuccessful sailing of Mowat's boat, Happy Adventure. Mowat thoroughly explains the trip, places, incidents, people, sights and sounds of the trip so that the reader can easily imagine being an integral part in the author's voyage. The author also spends a great deal of time talking about the unusual lifestyles and behaviors of the people of Newfoundland and their intense dislike of mainlanders. The latter makes it even more difficult for Mowat and McClelland to begin on their seafaring adventure. The end of the book details Mowat's promise to the boat to take her back home where she belongs.



Quotes

"Among the attitudes I acquired from my father was a romantic and Conradian predilection for the sea and ships," (Chapter 1, pg. 4.)

"The five hundred and fifty mile voyage across the center of Newfoundland was a prolonged exercise in masochism" (Chapter 2, pg. 21.)

"The day had dawned when he and the little schooner would come together for the first time" (Chapter 5, pg. 42.)

"All in all, the design was diabolically efficient, for it guaranteed that any man who could stay in those bunks longer than twenty minutes at a time had to be close to dissolution" (Chapter 7, pg. 64.)

"We had no intention of girdling the world in a nameless ship" (Chapter 7, pg. 69.)

"One small difficulty remained. We had no charts of the east coast of Newfoundland" (Chapter 8, pg. 75.)

"He seemed genuinely incredulous to find we did not have a radar set" (Chapter 8, pg. 83.)

"What the final outcome might have been is anybody's guess" (Chapter 9, pg. 90.)

"We spent five days waiting for good weather before reaching the conclusion that to wait was vain" (Chapter 10, pg. 95.)

"Mike had recently reread Moby Dick and he was fired by a desire to experience the passions of a whaler" (Chapter 12, pg. 122.)

"Our launching was something of a celebration in its own right" (Chapter 13, pg. 140.)

"The certainty of fog was one of the few things we were able to rely upon" (Chapter 16, pg. 171.)



Topics for Discussion

How might the story have changed if Jack McClelland had not agreed to go on the journey with Mowat? Do you think Mowat would have gone anyway? If so, how could he manage alone?

Mowat faced his first real interaction with Newfoundlanders when he met the Hallohans. Why do you think the brothers took advantage of Mowat? Did Mowat consider them to be brigands? Why did Mowat go through with the deal?

Discuss the attitude of the people at Muddy Hole as it applies to Mowat and McClelland. How did things change over the first months?

Why do you think the merchants in St. John's acted the way they did toward customers? Do you think the behavior was reserved for outsiders or anyone who approached them? How could the stores stay open without income?

Blanche, the dog with a pure soul, is an interesting character in the book. Do water dogs really exist? If so, where? What type of breed is the dog? Is there more than one? How are they trained?

The book takes place over the course of many years. How is it possible that Mowat could devote his entire life to the voyage? How did he live with no money or home for the off seasons? How did the other crew members survive on and off season?

After so many years of leaking boats, mechanical mishaps and every other conceivable problem, why didn't Mowat simply give up? If Mowat wanted to continue sailing, why not get another boat? Do you believe that the Happy Adventure had a mind of her own?