

Dana Kroos

Poem and Thoughts

The Burgeo Gut

When I was dying
You spoke to me in low whisper,
the shadow of a city sunk
beneath a swallowed coastline, in dammed reservoir.
Above: the trample of industry, diesel motors, electricity.
Below: the ebb and flow of breath and migration.

I should have been thinking of flight,
but I was enchanted by the sun
slivered into shards so small.

You waited.
You called.
The womb-shaped bay, the strangled umbilical chord
choked before it reached the sea. I heard you

though your words were only song.
It did not matter what they said,
the meaning was ours.

Who would have thought we would travel so far—
seasons recorded in synchronized sound,
from bright surface to obsidian core—
to meet an end in shallow water?
The deep released,
a last exhale
upon the shore.

Below is the story of the Burgeo Gut. None of this is spoken of directly in the poem; it isn't even obvious that the poem is about whales. Don't feel that you need to reference this story, I simply offer it in case you are looking for further inspiration.

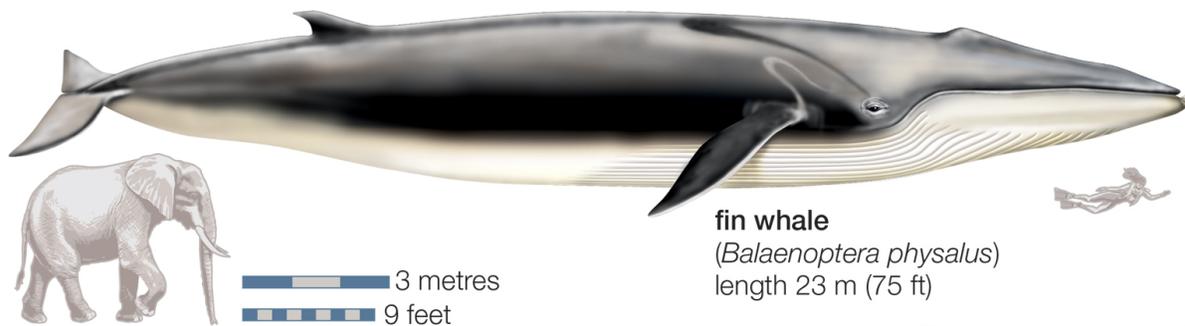
Burgeo is a small, coastal town on the island of Newfoundland, Canada. In 1962 a Fin whale became caught in the gut, (which is like a bay with a very narrow opening to the sea). The opening was so narrow and shallow that the whale became trapped when the tide went down.

She had been swimming with her mate, and for the hours that she was trapped in the gut, her mate swam around near the opening of the gut calling to her and trying to chase fish into the gut to keep her fed.

Many of the people in Burgeo were whalers and made a living from whaling, which wasn't uncommon in Newfoundland in the 60's. The people of the town had two very different responses to the trapped whale. Some saw her as prey and decided to kill her for food and profit, however, they didn't have sufficient weapons and their shots and spearings did not make fatal wounds. Other residents of Burgeo wanted to protect the whale. They entered the gut in boats and tried to get in the way of those hunting the whale, hoping they could protect her until high tide when she would be able to escape.

Ultimately the whale died a death of a thousand cuts. Adding to the tragedy, the whale was too large for the fishermen to pull from the gut and the meat, oil, etc. went to waste. Some people say that on a clear day, you can still go out in a boat and look down into the water in the Burgeo gut and see the whale's skeleton.

Fin whales are huge, they can get to 85 feet and live for 90 years. Pretty amazing.



This is a sad story, of course. You can view the actions of the fishermen as necessary for survival (had the fishermen been able to draw the whale onto the shore for harvest this would have been a major success for the town in supplying food and money through the sales of whale products, and may have meant that fishermen did not need to go to sea where fatalities were not uncommon,) or brutal (given that the fight was so unfair and ill thought-out, causing needless suffering), but the commitment and bond between the two animals is really incredible,

what most interests me, and what the poem is about. For hours the two whales sang back and forth, one trapped, the other frantic because his mate was in trouble.

Below is a brief description about the fictionalized novel about the incident written by Newfoundland writer Farley Mowat. From: <http://pankmagazine.com/2014/07/16/dead-alive-farley-mowat-burgeo-newfoundland/>

In *A Whale for the Killing*, Farley Mowat retold the story of a Fin whale becoming trapped in a Burgeo cove in 1967. Burgeo's sleepy, wholesome feel was disrupted when a handful of locals shot at the whale from the shore with rifles and otherwise injured the eighty-foot mammal with boat propellers. The whale was pregnant, and slowly, over the course of many days, she died from infected wounds. Mowat was influential in raising a public outcry, bringing international attention and plenty of negative publicity not just to Burgeo, but the commercial whaling industry in general.