

Sterling Hayden and the Sea

The lives and film careers of Hollywood stars are fertile ground for biographers. Marilyn Monroe, Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck and Joan Crawford all have eight or more published biographies. Among male stars, Humphrey Bogart is the leader with an equal number of biographies and reminiscences, often focused on his memorable relationship with Lauren Bacall. Not far behind, Frank Sinatra's life as film star and heartthrob singer is chronicled in seven biographies and an autobiography. Even less famous actors such as Fred McMurray, Ida Lupino, James Mason and George C. Scott have received book length biographies.

Sterling Hayden has yet to find his biographer. From 1941 till 1981, Hayden starred, or was a character actor, in 58 movies and numerous TV dramas. An actor's legacy is often defined by their film directors and Hayden worked for some of the best, including John Huston, Stanley Kubrick, Francis Ford Coppola and Robert Altman. Not content to be solely a Hollywood actor, Hayden used the considerable downtime between movies to pursue a passion for writing, first with screenplays that were never produced and then with a successful autobiography and novel.

And Hayden was deeply involved in the events that animated the world in the 1940's and 50s. He left Hollywood when he was a rising star to enlist in the war effort, first as a Marine and then as a member of the Office of Strategic Services. After the war, Hayden briefly joined the communist party which led to his testimony at the second round of the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings on communist influence in Hollywood. To avoid being blacklisted, Hayden became a friendly witness and, although lauded as a hero by the public consumed with the red scare, regretted for the rest of his life this moment of cowardice.

During the many opportunities he had to write or talk about his life, Hayden focused not on the acting or the writing but, on his first and life long love, the sea. From childhood till his final days, he lived on, or near, or in anticipation of his next

opportunity to get to, the sea. His Hollywood publicist allowed that “Sterling Hayden was born in the wrong century. He should have been a sea captain in the 1800s.” Or as Hayden himself said in an interview on Tom Snyder’s Tomorrow Show. “I happen to be if nothing else a man who thinks the only way I can get by in life is not to be like anybody else you know. A professional irregular...I’ve had seventeen ships, I’ve never had a house.” Hollywood biographies are usually built around the movies. With Hayden it makes more sense to focus on the sea, and find the man among the boats and the voyages. And it started very young.

Sterling Hayden was born Sterling Walter in Upper Montclair New Jersey in 1916. His family was solidly middle class led by an advertising salesman father who commuted daily to New York City. In his autobiography, Hayden describes his father as a tall, sickly man, who five days a week, fifty weeks a year took the same train to and from the city. He remembered these early years as “a peaceful life, so peaceful, in fact, that it made me restless.” A vivid memory came when he accompanied his father on the daily trek to the office. Surrounded by commuters with noses buried in the morning paper, the young boy reveled in the ferry boat trip across the Hudson. He wandered throughout the boat and described facing the wind “chewing off chunks and swallowing them alive.” At the tender age of nine, he had already come to wish that he “could ride back and forth for days and months and live in a lifeboat or up in the pilothouse.”

His father died shortly after this memorable trip and three years later his mother married James Hayden, a sort of con man, who both gave Sterling his lifelong last name and shaped the next phase of his life as the family chased around the northeast embroiled in his stepfather’s unsuccessful money making schemes. As the country fell into the Great Depression, the family found itself on the coast of Maine, out of money and prospects. As his parents bickered, Sterling frequented the shops of ship chandlers and sailmakers and devoured books about ocean voyages from the local library. When the family had to scramble for a cheap place to live, Sterling convinced his parents to rent the only house on tiny Tumbler Island in Boothbay Harbor off the shore of Maine.

From the age of twelve to fifteen, Hayden lived a solitary life on the island. With no way to attend school, he spent most of his days in a little dory which he could both sail or row about the harbor. He became friends with many of the “old salts” of the sea-going town especially a sailmaker named John Howell. When Sterling first found the courage to enter the shop, he was greeted warmly since Howell had often seen him in the little dory and quickly surmised that the boy was “sea-struck.” Howell had one piece of sea going advice: “You go, boy, you go, no matter what they say, you go, understand.”

Hayden took the advice to heart. After three years on Tumbler island, his parents found a little extra money for a boarding school in Maine. The school was too restrictive and, as it turned out, his stepfather had funneled the tuition money into another failed scheme. So Hayden was hardly missed when he ran away to find a ship. But in the midst of the depression there was little opportunity for an aspiring sailor with no experience. That was until the owner of a nautical instrument shop who had befriended Hayden, mentioned a ship headed from Boston to Los Angeles through the Panama Canal. The ship was named the Puritan and it offered Hayden his introduction to life as a working sailor. The Puritan took four months to reach Los Angeles and in his autobiography Hayden recalls the advice he received from a seasoned shipmate.

So, kid, I tell you what you do; you stick with me and we'll beat our way back from California by freight an' then you go back to school, see? Go back to school an' make something out of yourself and then if you wanna, buy yourself a yacht. But for Jesus' sake quit going to sea.

Hayden returned home by rail alongside long time hoboes and drifters. Little had changed and his stay was short and hardly sweet. And Hayden had a new dream, to sail to the South Seas. To fulfill this dream he needed money, so he signed on to a working schooner headed to the famous Atlantic fishing area, the Grand Banks.

Hollywood glorified the Grand Banks fishing fleet in the movie Captains Courageous adapted from Kipling's novel and starring Mickey Rooney and Spencer Tracey, who won the Oscar for best actor for his portrayal of a doomed Portuguese fisherman. Hayden was equally dazzled by the Grand Banks experience which he saw as a step on his quest to be both a sailor and man. In his autobiography, he mused "well, he thought, here I am; all my life I'll be able to say; when I was a kid hauling trawl, in a dory, down on the Banks in the dead of wintertime." When Hayden was asked to write the introduction to a book about the sailing schooners of the late 19th and early 20th century, he saluted his shipmates.

Maybe there are "riches" in the convoluted world the arbiters of the Fortune Five Hundred way of life don't know damned all about. One thing for sure; the fishermen enshrined in these pages knew what it was like to bust their guts and haul their hearts out...then maybe hang to the vessel's wheel and ease her as they roared toward home and mother with the rail dragging the water, the salt spray rattling like machine gun fire off whatever canvass might be drawing her back under the lee of homeland.

With earnings from the Grand Banks, Hayden purchased a thirty foot sloop that he named The Horizon. He sailed the coast of Maine, even making a little money taking out tourists. Unfortunately, the Horizon's hull turned out to be rotten so he sold her and signed on to a crew delivering a yacht to Miami. There he found a freighter going to Cuba before eventually ending up on a yacht hanging out in the Caribbean. Putting his growing resume to use, he landed a dream job as first mate on the schooner Yankee, headed around the world with a crew of wealthy young men and women who signed on for an adventure at sea. The Yankee was Hayden's home for the next two and a half years. In his autobiography, he remembered the day the adventure started.

Down the winding road to the harbor I trudged with the seabag slung on my shoulder, my eyes fixed on the Yankee, which lay to the end of the wharf. And I wouldn't have traded places with any man on earth. It was March 20, 1936 and I was twenty years old that day.

The captain of the Yankee was Irving Johnson who wrote in his own autobiography that:

Sterling Hayden of Gloucester, the first mate, was that rare find, a born sailor, a “natural”. This is the greatest quality a man can hope to find in the man to whom he will at times have to entrust the command of his ship. And over the next three years Hayden’s sailing exploits were noticed by a broader audience. In 1938, Hayden crewed in the Americas Cup of the era, a well publicized race between the two most celebrated fishing schooners in the Northeastern fleet. It was a best three out of five series between the Gertrude L. Thebaud and the Bluenose. Hayden’s exploits found their way into a Boston Post article headlined “Thebaud Sailor Like Movie Idol” which noted “more than an few of the scores of women who viewed the vessels yesterday at the fish pier inquired as to his identity.” And Joseph Garland in this sailing memoir, *Down to the Sea*, remembered:

The giant young adventurer and movie actor-to-be, Sterling Hayden, played the mainmasthead to Jack Hachett’s foremast in the 1938 races, swinging and swaying and pitching and whipping exponentially to the slightest motion of the hull so far below...An incredulous few still remember Hayden crossing from one masthead to the other, hand over hand along the thirty feet of spring stay.

Hayden parlayed his newfound notoriety into an opportunity to fulfill his dream of a trip to Tahiti in command of the sailing ship Florence C. Robinson. He recruited a largely untested crew with the average age of twenty-six and as they left port in November, 1938, a Boston Herald editorial noted the dangers of the voyage but enthused “What young men would not be with them?” While still working their way down the East Coast, a terrible storm struck which led Hayden to some soul searching recounted in his autobiography.

Why must I go on playing this game, why not give up the sea and live as other do; why not, once this voyage is done, take a fling at Hollywood? Take the dough and fool around with the starlets and read your name in the papers, and maybe, after a couple of years, buy yourself a vessel, the

finest kind of a vessel-and then you'll have the world by the tail on a downhill haul.

The Florence Robinson weathered the storm and made it to Tahiti. And in a virtually Hollywood scripted scene, Hayden fell in love with an island girl and concocted a plan to buy a ship in the U.S., bring it to Tahiti, and live the rest of his life happily married and delivering freight and passengers between the Polynesian islands. He bid his island girl a supposed brief good bye and returned to the states to raise the money to buy a vessel he had seen in Panama. It was a 161 foot steel ship that, before falling into disrepair, had served as Kaiser Wilhelm's official yacht. The purchase was made and Hayden and a skeleton crew headed to Boston for refitting. Once again a storm intervened and this time the ship was so severely damaged it had to be scrapped in Charleston. His investor backed out and with no money and no ship, Hayden signed back on to a Grand Banks fishing schooner. He spent a month on the Banks and ended up with a share of \$66.43 which he calculated to have been paid at a rate of twenty-one cents an hour. He had no boat, no future in Tahiti with a beautiful island girl and only sixty some odd dollars to show for four years at sea. Who could have guessed that the next stop was Hollywood.

In 1951 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, Hayden was asked about his first Hollywood contract.

Well, it was pretty much a fluke...the seafaring thing was washed up, and I simply met a correspondent in Boston who was a producer, and he told [another] producer about me, and he contacted me in New York and made a test, a very bad test, but it got me a contract with Paramount and I went to work as an actor.

Hayden's leap to an acting career was very much a product of the Hollywood studio system. He signed a standard seven year contract which, as explained by Otto Friedrich in *City of Nets*, "...gave the studio not only the right to decide on each renewal but also the right to make all the professional decisions in the actor's life." The studio system insured a flow of young aspiring actors who were

“beautiful and talented, of course, but also pliant, flexible, and, above all, obedient.” The screen test “showed studio bosses how potential stars would photograph before anything was done to ‘fix them up.’” If all went well, the young actor began with bit parts and walk-ons followed by small dialogue roles and eventually featured roles in movies starring established actors and actresses.

Hayden signed his contract and moved with his mother to Hollywood, his stepfather being conveniently left behind. His initial salary of \$600 a month was “three times as much as he had ever earned at sea.” And speaking of himself in the third person, Hayden recounted;

He had a dressing room on the second floor, overlooking the production building and Stage 23. It was directly over Mr. Gary Cooper’s dressing room...He plastered the walls with pictures; pictures of schooners, barks, brigs, and ships; pictures of equatorial crossings, pictures of dories tossed on slate-gray seas under slate-grey skies, of vessels beleaguered by storm and entranced by calm.

Hayden had no acting experience but was six foot, five inches tall and thought by many to be the most handsome new face in Hollywood. Skipping the typical apprenticeship of walk-ons and bit parts, he was cast in his first movie in a supporting role to established stars Fred McMurray and Madeline Carroll. He made a strong enough impression that he was selected to co-star with Carroll in her next big film, *Bahama Passage*. Far from being the “obedient” newcomer, Hayden threaten to quit halfway through filming unless Paramount bought him the schooner that MGM had used for the filming of *Captain’s Courageous*. The head of Paramount fumed, but relented, and purchased the ship for \$18,000. Hayden was already making a name for himself as a unconventional young star.

At thirty-five years old, Madeline Carroll was ten years Hayden’s senior and among the highest paid actresses in the world, having risen to international fame in Alfred Hitchcock’s *39 Steps*. She was the first of Hitchcock’s “ice cold blonds” and Hayden was instantly infatuated. Carroll was British, divorced and in a relationship with a French aviator who had recently reappeared after being

reported lost in the war. Hayden was in the midst of his first Hollywood starlet fling with nineteen year old Yvonne DeCarlo. Hayden and Carroll were an instant item, even being mentioned in a Photoplay article that talked about the “epidemic” sweeping Hollywood of “women in their comfortable thirties and forties” rushing to the altar with much younger grooms. They were married in 1942 after she finished her next film, *My Favorite Blonde*, with Bob Hope. Hope reportedly also fell for Carroll but was rebuffed by her and afraid of Hayden “who was reputed to be extra-handy with his fists when any ‘vital interest’ of his was threatened.”

While certainly making the most of his initial Hollywood success, Hayden had no great love for acting. As the US entered the war, he joined the rush of male stars looking to offer their services. Unlike many of the older generation like Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda and Robert Montgomery, Hayden was young enough to enlist. He first went to England to train as a commando. When he was injured during a parachute training jump, he returned to the states to try the Navy. When this failed, he used his own ship and crew to deliver war materials and other cargo throughout the Caribbean. Still determined to get into the fighting, he joined the marines and coming out of boot camp was picked up by the Office of Strategic Services, Bill Donovan’s eclectic group of adventurers bent on defeating the Germans with untraditional warfare.

Max Hasting’s history of the OSS allows that Donovan was often star struck as he recruited his unconventional warriors. He asked Errol Flynn to take on a secret mission to Ireland to negotiate the use of naval bases. John Wayne worked his contacts to meet Donovan and report that he was ready to serve as soon as he finished the three pictures he was committed to. As Wayne’s biographer summed up the encounter, “Fade out.” Hayden was hardly this level of star but he was young, had a Hollywood pedigree and his maritime skills were at a premium. After an initial stop in Egypt, he was sent to Italy to establish a supply system for Yugoslav communists under Tito who were fighting a guerrilla war against the Germans. Hayden gathered a fleet of seventeen small steamers and schooners which ran the German blockade across the Adriatic. He

personally commanded ships on many of these missions and spent time under fire in Yugoslavia. His respect for the courage and dedication of the communist partisans led to, at least in part, his brief fling with the US communist party in the post-war years and his subsequent history with the Un American Activities Committee investigation into Hollywood. During the hearings he was asked about the year spent working with the partisans.

We established a tremendously close personal feeling with these people. We had enormous, I would say unlimited respect for the way they were fighting...I had never experienced anything quite like that, and it made a tremendous impression on me.

Madeline Carroll had also left Hollywood for the war effort. As a naturalized US citizen, Carroll worked as a Red Cross nurse at an air force hospital in Italy. With the war now over and both in Paris, husband and wife were able to briefly reunite. But, as Hayden remembered in this autobiography;

She had taken an apartment in Paris and spoke longingly of remaining in Europe for several years. And we knew, without knowing why, without much discussion, that the marriage had dissolved. All that remained was the need to petition a court to recognize this fact.

Carroll would come out of the war with the Legion of Honor from France and a Medal of Freedom from the United States. Hayden earned a US silver star and the Order of Merit from the Yugoslav government which thanked Hayden for "what he did for us when we did not have very many friends and when being a friend of ours was very dangerous."

Hayden returned to Hollywood a war hero with an uncertain future in the movie business. The qualities that led to his early success Hollywood, his imposing height and good looks, were still there but, he knew little about acting. In his later testimony to the HUAC committee he explained his state of mind.

I was sort of betwixt and between. The sea had been my calling. This was now denied me, or I had denied myself it. I was feeling restless and dissatisfied in Hollywood.

And looking back on this time in his autobiography, he lamented that “From June 1946 to June 1949 I worked 75 days out of 1095. The rest of the time I did nothing.”

The final years of the 1940s were nonetheless an active time in Hayden’s personal life and in his ongoing affair with ships and the sea. Returning to Hollywood, he bought and lived aboard a 63 foot schooner which he named the Quest. While working on movies, he lived in a rented apartment above a garage. In 1947 he married Betty De Noon who he would later describe in a fan magazine article as “a Pasadena society girl [whose] willingness to live on a boat and share my life seemed the answer to my continuous search for a life like other people knew.” A son Christian was born in August 1948 followed by another son, Dana, eleven months later. The family eventually grew to include a third son and a daughter.

It is easy to discern Hayden’s priorities in his autobiographical history of these years as he mentions his family and movie career almost in passing, while lavishing considerable detail on the purchase and refurbishing of ships. While on his honeymoon, Hayden sold the boat he was living on and immediately bought a schooner in Maine which was shipped to California. He fixed “her up like a ship in a bottle” and sailed whenever possible off the coast. Meanwhile he purchased a big schooner named the Gracie S which he renovated only to be sold. By the end of the 1940s, he had purchased, refurbished and sold a series of ships leaving only a 45 ton Norwegian ketch.

I gave the ketch my favorite name at the time: Outward Bound. She was my mistress, though she was old and tired, and only her name held promise. We made a proper pair.

The 1950s were both professionally productive and personally challenging for Hayden. The decade started with a professional breakthrough when MGM’s top director, John Huston, cast him in the film noir hit Asphalt Jungle. As a later film historian explained, it was an A level picture with a B level look that had “no stars

except Sterling Hayden, who was hardly a major one.” In a 1980 interview for American Film magazine, Huston was questioned on why he cast Hayden.

I ask Huston whatever made him cast Sterling Hayden in the lead in Asphalt Jungle when Hayden was then simply known as the hunk of man who had married Madeline Carroll. Huston laughs and replies, “I always found Sterling a very interesting man. I used him before he began to blossom. He was known then for his physique other than his talent. But physically, he looked the part of what they call a gorilla the strong man in a robbery.”

From 1950 through 1958, Hayden was a lead actor in more than thirty films. After Asphalt Jungle, the next memorable role was in Johnny Guitar directed by Nicolas Ray and starring Joan Crawford. The film was an unorthodox western with “bluntly presented gender reversals.” Crawford and Mercedes Cambridge played tough women while the men, led by Hayden, played gentler types. It was a difficult time in Hayden’s personal life, with his marriage coming apart and his spirit still damaged by his congressional testimony. And the role of a guitar playing gunman was nothing, if not, unusual. As he told a later interviewer.

He felt foolish toting around a guitar. “I can’t play guitar and I can’t sing.” Hayden said to one interviewer. “They put twine on the guitar so, in case I hit it, it wouldn’t go plunk.”

The film’s initial reviews were mixed, but over time it gained popularity as an art film in Europe. Ray, who next went on to direct Rebel Without a Cause, was interviewed by a French film critic.

When one Frenchman raved to him about Johnny Guitar-which Ray himself considered a troublesome career blip he would rather have forgotten-he was stunned. “He almost persuaded me it was a great movie” he joked.

Years after its release the National Film Preservation Board voted to add Johnny Guitar to the United States Film Registry, judging it “culturally, historically, and aesthetically important.”

Two years later, Hayden received a script called *The Killing*. It was written by, and slated to be produced and directed by, a new talent named Stanley Kubrick. It was his first Hollywood film and his biographer recounted how Hayden came to play the role of the tough leader of a race track heist gang. Hayden's agent called Kubrick's partner and this conversation ensued.

I represent Sterling Hayden. We like your script a lot, but who is Stanley Kubrick? It's not Stanley Kramer you're talking about...No it's Stanley Kubrick...I never heard of him...but we like your script a lot. Well, Kubrick is terrific and so you're saying that Sterling would like to do the film? He said, 'You know if you make an offer.' What's Sterling's price? He gets \$40,000.

The movie became a noir classic and Kubrick went on to be a legendary director.

The last of Hayden's 1950 films was *Terror in a Texas Town*, a B movie remake of *High Noon* with a script written by Dalton Trumbo, one of the original Hollywood blacklisted writers. In one of the weirdest scenes of any western, Hayden wins the final confrontation by hurling a whaling harpoon faster than the villain can draw his gun and shoot. One wonders if this scene, which parodies Hayden's seafaring history, was Trumbo's revenge for Hayden's friendly testimony.

Throughout the 1950s, Hayden was determined to maintain his stature as a sailor rather than a mere yachtsman. Sailors were true creatures of the oceans while yachtsmen were the rich playing with their money. And Hollywood was full of rich yachtsmen and their sailing stories. In his memoir, *Salad Days*, Douglas Fairbanks remembered his first cabin cruiser that he'd sold on only to see it used by its new owner in the Dunkirk evacuation. Errol Flynn's memoir, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, talks about his early days working on ships off his native Australia and his later purchase of a yacht, the *Sirocco*, which was berthed in Newport Harbor next to movie mogul Jack Warner's sailboat, the *Southward*. Flynn was known more for his womanizing aboard his yacht but held that "The only real wives I have ever had have been my sailing ships." Even the quintessential cowboy John Wayne loved boats and his biographer said he was "far less a cowboy at heart than he was a sailor." His first boat, a seventy-three foot motor

sailor, was supplanted by an ex-minesweeper named the Wild Goose. Wayne's most recent biography tells the later history of the ship.

In 1991, the Wild Goose was purchased by the former owner of the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas. Today, the ship remains a floating shrine to the memory of John Wayne and is available for charter out of Newport Beach. Likewise, the bar at the Balboa Yacht Club in Newport Beach is called Duke's Place, where there is a floor-to-ceiling painting of Wayne at the helm of the Wild Goose.

Hayden considered himself a sailor who acted. His mirror image in Hollywood in the 1950's was Humphrey Bogart. Bogart was the A level film noir star to Hayden's B level status. And Bogart also loved to sail. He started with a small power cruiser named Sluggo and then switched to racing a 21ft. sloop. In late 1945 he purchased his dream ship, a fifty-four foot yawl he named Santana. Bogie and Lauren Bacall spent most non-working weekends aboard Santana and periodically sailed it to the favorite offshore site for Hollywood yachtsmen, Catalina Island.

For longer outings and racing, Bogie had a professional crew including a seasoned sailor named Larry Dudley who went on to write a lovely little remembrance called *Sailing with Bogie*. In the forward to the book, Dudley lists his mates as some of the "finest sailors on the ocean including his long-time friend, Sterling Hayden." Dudley quotes from a newspaper article that Bogart wrote about Hollywood sailors.

I have tried to exercise restraint and pretend to be nothing more than an actor who sails and not a sailor who acts. This way I don't tread on the toes of my professional boating friends who after all would be darned unwelcome if they came to Warner Bros and tried to tell me how to play a scene.

As Hayden entered his fourth decade he was working virtually non-stop. He professed to hate acting but was becoming more accomplished even though leading roles in B movies would never lead to stardom. Perhaps most depressingly, with little time left for sailing, Hayden risked crossing the dreaded

line between true sailor and yachtsman. In 1958, a bitter divorce concluded with him gaining custody of the four children. Hayden repurchased the big schooner he had previously owned and refurbished. He renamed her the Wanderer and hatched a plan to escape Hollywood with his kids on a voyage of discovery and renewal. As Hayden wrote in his autobiography.

To be truly challenging, a voyage, like a life must rest on a firm foundation of financial unrest. Otherwise, you are doomed to a routine traverse, the kind known to yachtsmen, who play with their boats at sea- “cruising” it is called. Voyaging belongs to seamen who cannot, or will not, fit in.

The voyage aboard the Wanderer was to be covered as a documentary, not because publicity was a real goal, but because Hayden needed financial support. He found a partial backer, liquidated all his savings and borrowed from friends. In mid-1958, Hayden placed ads in the personal columns of several metropolitan papers looking for “six active and intelligent” young men and women to round out the crew of seasoned sailors and their families who had already signed on. He received 2000 replies. His ex-wife got wind of his plans and immediately petitioned the court for a restraining order to stop Hayden from taking the children out of the country. After costly litigation, the court ruled in favor of Hayden’s ex-wife. Undeterred, Hayden prepared to leave. As 1958 drew to a close, the Wanderer was ready. In his autobiography, he sets the scene.

Poised this night: seven children and thirteen adults; ten tons of water, six tons of fuel, a four-month supply of food; three hundred charts- within the trussed shell of the last merchant-built windjammer to fly the American flag (museum ships excepted).

And in the ship log, on day one, Hayden entered; “Your honor sir, the proposed ocean voyage is no longer enjoined- for the record, that is.”

The Wanderer reached Tahiti on March 4, 1959. Hayden had succeeded in sailing to the South Seas with his children but, he hadn’t solved the question of what to do next with his life. On October 4, 1959 the Wanderer left Tahiti bound back to San Francisco. After 4450 more miles at sea, she tied up in the San Francisco harbor November 15, 1959. Over the next few weeks, Hayden

returned to court to answer for his defiance of the restraining order. In the end, the judge, like most of the Hollywood community and the press, seemed dazzled that Hayden had actually pulled off the trip. He was fined five hundred dollars and sentenced to five days in jail, with jail time suspended.

Hayden was 43 years old when he returned from his ocean voyage. He had a divorce settlement and four children to raise and he still faced making a living in an industry he professed to hate. For the remainder of his life he worked only as necessary to pay the bills. From Stanley Kubrick in *Dr. Strangelove*, to Francis Ford Coppola in *The Godfather*, to Robert Altman in *The Long Goodbye* to Bernardo Bertolucci in *1900*, the greatest directors of the era sought out Hayden for supporting roles in major movies. A film historian summed up Hayden's movie career in an article in *Film Reference* magazine.

Playing such roles as the hired gunman who dies trying to get back to his horses in Kentucky in *The Asphalt Jungle*, the hard boiled leader of a doomed gang of race track thieves in *The Killing*, and the mad General Ripper who destroys the world in *Dr. Strangelove*, Hayden was fixed in the public mind as the doomed man of conviction, the man who lives and dies by a bizarre and somewhat perverted moral code.

As acting ceased to consume his time, Hayden turned to his long held goal of becoming a writer. In earlier years he worked on screenplays which largely adapted seafaring classics. None lead to actual movies, but they did teach him a lot about writing, especially dialogue. He put that training to use in his autobiography, *The Wanderer*, which was published in 1963 to modest success. In 1976, Hayden published his only novel, *The Voyage*, which followed a group of seamen as they endured a harrowing trip around the bottom of South America. The book mined the experiences and themes of Hayden's life and included a lead character, Simon Harwar, who was a thinly veiled stand-in for Hayden himself. Harwar was a six foot-five inch alcoholic sailor, attached to his mother and worried about being too handsome to be taken seriously as a man. Near the end of the voyage, as he can see that there is little left for him on-shore, he sums up what one suspects Hayden often thought of himself.

Funny that a man could steer three and a half thousand tons of four-mast barque, yet not be able to steer two hundred and thirty pounds of himself.

But what of Hayden and the sea during this period of his life. Since his autobiography ends with the return from Tahiti, we don't know when he sold the Wanderer or if it was replaced with another sea going ship. He remarried in 1960 and fathered two more children. His third wife and growing family settled in Connecticut, while he shuttled between home, location work and a canal barge which he purchased in Amsterdam in 1969 and berthed first in Paris and then in the south of France. From sea going adventurer, to captain of a largely stationary barge, was quite a change. In 1982, a German film crew visited Hayden to produce a documentary about his life. Hayden was charming but drunk throughout the filming. He later said that after seeing himself in the film he gave up liquor for marijuana ,which he found to be much less addictive. In the documentary, he reads from Robert Louis Stevenson's travel book *Inland Voyage* to explain his present life on the water.

Of all the creatures of commercial enterprise, a canal barge is by far the most delightful to consider. It may spread its sails, and then you see it sailing high above the treetops and the windmill, sailing on the aqueduct, sailing through the green corn lands: the most picturesque of things amphibious. Or the horse plods along at a footpace as if there were no such thing as business in the world: and the man dreaming at the tiller sees the same spire on the horizon all day long....There should be many contented spirits on board, for such a life is both to travel and to stay at home.

We don't know the names of all sixteen of Sterling Hayden's boats. But the ones we do know, *Horizon*, *The Quest*, *Outward Bound*, and the *Wanderer* show a man seeking something essential from the sea. And maybe it was what Stevenson found on his canal barge: "to travel and to stay at home." That is what Hayden sought all his life and one can only hope that periodically he found that peace. Hayden died of cancer in 1986. In her book, *By Myself*, Lauren

Bacall chronicles the outpouring of grief in Hollywood at the death of Humphrey Bogart. And she quotes a note of condolence she received from Hayden.

There are those who say our maker has things all worked out for us and whatever happens is for the best. There are times when I can't agree and this is one of them.

A life like Sterling Hayden's would have given our maker a healthy task to plan out in advance. Over an amazing seventy years of life, he was an actor and a writer, a war hero and a turncoat, a husband to three and a father to six. But most of all, I suspect he would want to be remembered as a sailor.

Sterling Hayden and the Sea

The lives and film careers of Hollywood stars are fertile ground for biographers. Marilyn Monroe, Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck and Joan Crawford all have eight or more published biographies. Among male stars, Humphrey Bogart is the leader with an equal number of biographies and reminiscences, often focused on his memorable relationship with Lauren Bacall. Not far behind, Frank Sinatra's life as film star and heartthrob singer is chronicled in seven biographies and an autobiography. Even less famous actors such as Fred McMurray, Ida Lupino, James Mason and George C. Scott have received book length biographies.

Sterling Hayden has yet to find his biographer. From 1941 till 1981, Hayden starred, or was a character actor, in 58 movies and numerous TV dramas. An actor's legacy is often defined by their film directors and Hayden worked for some of the best, including John Huston, Stanley Kubrick, Francis Ford Coppola

and Robert Altman. Not content to be solely a Hollywood actor, Hayden used the considerable downtime between movies to pursue a passion for writing, first with screenplays that were never produced and then with a successful autobiography and novel.

And Hayden was deeply involved in the events that animated the world in the 1940's and 50s. He left Hollywood when he was a rising star to enlist in the war effort, first as a Marine and then as a member of the Office of Strategic Services. After the war, Hayden briefly joined the communist party which led to his testimony at the second round of the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings on communist influence in Hollywood. To avoid being blacklisted, Hayden became a friendly witness and, although lauded as a hero by the public consumed with the red scare, regretted for the rest of his life this moment of cowardice.

During the many opportunities he had to write or talk about his life, Hayden focused not on the acting or the writing but, on his first and life long love, the sea. From childhood till his final days, he lived on, or near, or in anticipation of his next opportunity to get to, the sea. His Hollywood publicist allowed that "Sterling Hayden was born in the wrong century. He should have been a sea captain in the 1800s." Or as Hayden himself said in an interview on Tom Snyder's Tomorrow Show. "I happen to be if nothing else a man who thinks the only way I can get by in life is not to be like anybody else you know. A professional irregular...I've had seventeen ships, I've never had a house." Hollywood biographies are usually built around the movies. With Hayden it makes more sense to focus on the sea, and find the man among the boats and the voyages. And it started very young.

Sterling Hayden was born Sterling Walter in Upper Montclair New Jersey in 1916. His family was solidly middle class led by an advertising salesman father who commuted daily to New York City. In his autobiography, Hayden describes his father as a tall, sickly man, who five days a week, fifty weeks a year took the same train to and from the city. He remembered these early years as "a peaceful

life, so peaceful, in fact, that it made me restless.” A vivid memory came when he accompanied his father on the daily trek to the office. Surrounded by commuters with noses buried in the morning paper, the young boy reveled in the ferry boat trip across the Hudson. He wandered throughout the boat and described facing the wind “chewing off chunks and swallowing them alive.” At the tender age of nine, he had already come to wish that he “could ride back and forth for days and months and live in a lifeboat or up in the pilothouse.”

His father died shortly after this memorable trip and three years later his mother married James Hayden, a sort of con man, who both gave Sterling his lifelong last name and shaped the next phase of his life as the family chased around the northeast embroiled in his stepfather’s unsuccessful money making schemes. As the country fell into the Great Depression, the family found itself on the coast of Maine, out of money and prospects. As his parents bickered, Sterling frequented the shops of ship chandlers and sailmakers and devoured books about ocean voyages from the local library. When the family had to scramble for a cheap place to live, Sterling convinced his parents to rent the only house on tiny Tumbler Island in Boothbay Harbor off the shore of Maine.

From the age of twelve to fifteen, Hayden lived a solitary life on the island. With no way to attend school, he spent most of his days in a little dory which he could both sail or row about the harbor. He became friends with many of the “old salts” of the sea-going town especially a sailmaker named John Howell. When Sterling first found the courage to enter the shop, he was greeted warmly since Howell had often seen him in the little dory and quickly surmised that the boy was “sea-struck.” Howell had one piece of sea going advice: “You go, boy, you go, no matter what they say, you go, understand.”

Hayden took the advice to heart. After three years on Tumbler island, his parents found a little extra money for a boarding school in Maine. The school was too restrictive and, as it turned out, his stepfather had funneled the tuition money into another failed scheme. So Hayden was hardly missed when he ran away to find a ship. But in the midst of the depression there was little opportunity for an

aspiring sailor with no experience. That was until the owner of a nautical instrument shop who had befriended Hayden, mentioned a ship headed from Boston to Los Angeles through the Panama Canal. The ship was named the Puritan and it offered Hayden his introduction to life as a working sailor. The Puritan took four months to reach Los Angeles and in his autobiography Hayden recalls the advice he received from a seasoned shipmate.

So, kid, I tell you what you do; you stick with me and we'll beat our way back from California by freight an' then you go back to school, see? Go back to school an' make something out of yourself and then if you wanna, buy yourself a yacht. But for Jesus' sake quit going to sea.

Hayden returned home by rail alongside long time hoboes and drifters. Little had changed and his stay was short and hardly sweet. And Hayden had a new dream, to sail to the South Seas. To fulfill this dream he needed money, so he signed on to a working schooner headed to the famous Atlantic fishing area, the Grand Banks.

Hollywood glorified the Grand Banks fishing fleet in the movie Captains Courageous adapted from Kipling's novel and starring Mickey Rooney and Spencer Tracey, who won the Oscar for best actor for his portrayal of a doomed Portuguese fisherman. Hayden was equally dazzled by the Grand Banks experience which he saw as a step on his quest to be both a sailor and man. In his autobiography, he mused "well, he thought, here I am; all my life I'll be able to say; when I was a kid hauling trawl, in a dory, down on the Banks in the dead of wintertime." When Hayden was asked to write the introduction to a book about the sailing schooners of the late 19th and early 20th century, he saluted his shipmates.

Maybe there are "riches" in the convoluted world the arbiters of the Fortune Five Hundred way of life don't know damned all about. One thing for sure; the fishermen enshrined in these pages knew what it was like to bust their guts and haul their hearts out...then maybe hang to the vessel's wheel and ease her as they roared toward home and mother with the rail dragging the

water, the salt spray rattling like machine gun fire off whatever canvass might be drawing her back under the lee of homeland.

With earnings from the Grand Banks, Hayden purchased a thirty foot sloop that he named The Horizon. He sailed the coast of Maine, even making a little money taking out tourists. Unfortunately, the Horizon's hull turned out to be rotten so he sold her and signed on to a crew delivering a yacht to Miami. There he found a freighter going to Cuba before eventually ending up on a yacht hanging out in the Caribbean. Putting his growing resume to use, he landed a dream job as first mate on the schooner Yankee, headed around the world with a crew of wealthy young men and women who signed on for an adventure at sea. The Yankee was Hayden's home for the next two and a half years. In his autobiography, he remembered the day the adventure started.

Down the winding road to the harbor I trudged with the seabag slung on my shoulder, my eyes fixed on the Yankee, which lay to the end of the wharf. And I wouldn't have traded places with any man on earth. It was March 20, 1936 and I was twenty years old that day.

The captain of the Yankee was Irving Johnson who wrote in his own autobiography that:

Sterling Hayden of Gloucester, the first mate, was that rare find, a born sailor, a "natural". This is the greatest quality a man can hope to find in the man to whom he will at times have to entrust the command of his ship. And over the next three years Hayden's sailing exploits were noticed by a broader audience. In 1938, Hayden crewed in the Americas Cup of the era, a well publicized race between the two most celebrated fishing schooners in the Northeastern fleet. It was a best three out of five series between the Gertrude L. Thebaud and the Bluenose. Hayden's exploits found their way into a Boston Post article headlined "Thebaud Sailor Like Movie Idol" which noted "more than an few of the scores of women who viewed the vessels yesterday at the fish pier inquired as to his identity." And Joseph Garland in this sailing memoir, *Down to the Sea*, remembered:

The giant young adventurer and movie actor-to-be, Sterling Hayden, played the mainmasthead to Jack Hachett's foremast in the 1938 races, swinging and swaying and pitching and whipping exponentially to the slightest motion of the hull so far below...An incredulous few still remember Hayden crossing from one masthead to the other, hand over hand along the thirty feet of spring stay.

Hayden parlayed his newfound notoriety into an opportunity to fulfill his dream of a trip to Tahiti in command of the sailing ship Florence C. Robinson. He recruited a largely untested crew with the average age of twenty-six and as they left port in November, 1938, a Boston Herald editorial noted the dangers of the voyage but enthused "What young men would not be with them?" While still working their way down the East Coast, a terrible storm struck which led Hayden to some soul searching recounted in his autobiography.

Why must I go on playing this game, why not give up the sea and live as other do; why not, once this voyage is done, take a fling at Hollywood? Take the dough and fool around with the starlets and read your name in the papers, and maybe, after a couple of years, buy yourself a vessel, the finest kind of a vessel-and then you'll have the world by the tail on a downhill haul.

The Florence Robinson weathered the storm and made it to Tahiti. And in a virtually Hollywood scripted scene, Hayden fell in love with an island girl and concocted a plan to buy a ship in the U.S., bring it to Tahiti, and live the rest of his life happily married and delivering freight and passengers between the Polynesian islands. He bid his island girl a supposed brief good bye and returned to the states to raise the money to buy a vessel he had seen in Panama. It was a 161 foot steel ship that, before falling into disrepair, had served as Kaiser Wilhelm's official yacht. The purchase was made and Hayden and a skeleton crew headed to Boston for refitting. Once again a storm intervened and this time the ship was so severely damaged it had to be scrapped in Charleston. His investor backed out and with no money and no ship, Hayden signed back on to a Grand Banks fishing schooner. He spent a month on the

Banks and ended up with a share of \$66.43 which he calculated to have been paid at a rate of twenty-one cents an hour. He had no boat, no future in Tahiti with a beautiful island girl and only sixty some odd dollars to show for four years at sea. Who could have guessed that the next stop was Hollywood.

In 1951 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, Hayden was asked about his first Hollywood contract.

Well, it was pretty much a fluke...the seafaring thing was washed up, and I simply met a correspondent in Boston who was a producer, and he told [another] producer about me, and he contacted me in New York and made a test, a very bad test, but it got me a contract with Paramount and I went to work as an actor.

Hayden's leap to an acting career was very much a product of the Hollywood studio system. He signed a standard seven year contract which, as explained by Otto Friedrich in *City of Nets*, "...gave the studio not only the right to decide on each renewal but also the right to make all the professional decisions in the actor's life." The studio system insured a flow of young aspiring actors who were "beautiful and talented, of course, but also pliant, flexible, and, above all, obedient." The screen test "showed studio bosses how potential stars would photograph before anything was done to 'fix them up.'" If all went well, the young actor began with bit parts and walk-ons followed by small dialogue roles and eventually featured roles in movies starring established actors and actresses.

Hayden signed his contract and moved with his mother to Hollywood, his stepfather being conveniently left behind. His initial salary of \$600 a month was "three times as much as he had ever earned at sea." And speaking of himself in the third person, Hayden recounted;

He had a dressing room on the second floor, overlooking the production building and Stage 23. It was directly over Mr. Gary Cooper's dressing room...He plastered the walls with pictures; pictures of schooners, barks, brigs, and ships; pictures of equatorial crossings, pictures of dories tossed

on slate-gray seas under slate-grey skies, of vessels beleaguered by storm and entranced by calm.

Hayden had no acting experience but was six foot, five inches tall and thought by many to be the most handsome new face in Hollywood. Skipping the typical apprenticeship of walk-ons and bit parts, he was cast in his first movie in a supporting role to established stars Fred McMurray and Madeline Carroll. He made a strong enough impression that he was selected to co-star with Carroll in her next big film, *Bahama Passage*. Far from being the “obedient” newcomer, Hayden threaten to quit halfway through filming unless Paramount bought him the schooner that MGM had used for the filming of *Captain’s Courageous*. The head of Paramount fumed, but relented, and purchased the ship for \$18,000. Hayden was already making a name for himself as a unconventional young star.

At thirty-five years old, Madeline Carroll was ten years Hayden’s senior and among the highest paid actresses in the world, having risen to international fame in Alfred Hitchcock’s *39 Steps*. She was the first of Hitchcock’s “ice cold blonds” and Hayden was instantly infatuated. Carroll was British, divorced and in a relationship with a French aviator who had recently reappeared after being reported lost in the war. Hayden was in the midst of his first Hollywood starlet fling with nineteen year old Yvonne DeCarlo. Hayden and Carroll were an instant item, even being mentioned in a *Photoplay* article that talked about the “epidemic” sweeping Hollywood of “women in their comfortable thirties and forties” rushing to the altar with much younger grooms. They were married in 1942 after she finished her next film, *My Favorite Blonde*, with Bob Hope. Hope reportedly also fell for Carroll but was rebuffed by her and afraid of Hayden “who was reputed to be extra-handy with his fists when any ‘vital interest’ of his was threatened.”

While certainly making the most of his initial Hollywood success, Hayden had no great love for acting. As the US entered the war, he joined the rush of male stars looking to offer their services. Unlike many of the older generation like Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda and Robert Montgomery, Hayden was young enough to

enlist. He first went to England to train as a commando. When he was injured during a parachute training jump, he returned to the states to try the Navy. When this failed, he used his own ship and crew to deliver war materials and other cargo throughout the Caribbean. Still determined to get into the fighting, he joined the marines and coming out of boot camp was picked up by the Office of Strategic Services, Bill Donovan's eclectic group of adventurers bent on defeating the Germans with untraditional warfare.

Max Hasting's history of the OSS allows that Donovan was often star struck as he recruited his unconventional warriors. He asked Errol Flynn to take on a secret mission to Ireland to negotiate the use of naval bases. John Wayne worked his contacts to meet Donovan and report that he was ready to serve as soon as he finished the three pictures he was committed to. As Wayne's biographer summed up the encounter, "Fade out." Hayden was hardly this level of star but he was young, had a Hollywood pedigree and his maritime skills were at a premium. After an initial stop in Egypt, he was sent to Italy to establish a supply system for Yugoslav communists under Tito who were fighting a guerrilla war against the Germans. Hayden gathered a fleet of seventeen small steamers and schooners which ran the German blockade across the Adriatic. He personally commanded ships on many of these missions and spent time under fire in Yugoslavia. His respect for the courage and dedication of the communist partisans led to, at least in part, his brief fling with the US communist party in the post-war years and his subsequent history with the Un American Activities Committee investigation into Hollywood. During the hearings he was asked about the year spent working with the partisans.

We established a tremendously close personal feeling with these people. We had enormous, I would say unlimited respect for the way they were fighting...I had never experienced anything quite like that, and it made a tremendous impression on me.

Madeline Carroll had also left Hollywood for the war effort. As a naturalized US citizen, Carroll worked as a Red Cross nurse at an air force hospital in Italy. With

the war now over and both in Paris, husband and wife were able to briefly reunite. But, as Hayden remembered in this autobiography;

She had taken an apartment in Paris and spoke longingly of remaining in Europe for several years. And we knew, without knowing why, without much discussion, that the marriage had dissolved. All that remained was the need to petition a court to recognize this fact.

Carroll would come out of the war with the Legion of Honor from France and a Medal of Freedom from the United States. Hayden earned a US silver star and the Order of Merit from the Yugoslav government which thanked Hayden for “what he did for us when we did not have very many friends and when being a friend of ours was very dangerous.”

Hayden returned to Hollywood a war hero with an uncertain future in the movie business. The qualities that led to his early success Hollywood, his imposing height and good looks, were still there but, he knew little about acting. In his later testimony to the HUAC committee he explained his state of mind.

I was sort of betwixt and between. The sea had been my calling. This was now denied me, or I had denied myself it. I was feeling restless and dissatisfied in Hollywood.

And looking back on this time in his autobiography, he lamented that “From June 1946 to June 1949 I worked 75 days out of 1095. The rest of the time I did nothing.”

The final years of the 1940s were nonetheless an active time in Hayden’s personal life and in his ongoing affair with ships and the sea. Returning to Hollywood, he bought and lived aboard a 63 foot schooner which he named the Quest. While working on movies, he lived in a rented apartment above a garage. In 1947 he married Betty De Noon who he would later describe in a fan magazine article as “a Pasadena society girl [whose] willingness to live on a boat and share my life seemed the answer to my continuous search for a life like other people knew.” A son Christian was born in August 1948 followed by another son, Dana, eleven months later. The family eventually grew to include a third son and a daughter.

It is easy to discern Hayden's priorities in his autobiographical history of these years as he mentions his family and movie career almost in passing, while lavishing considerable detail on the purchase and refurbishing of ships. While on his honeymoon, Hayden sold the boat he was living on and immediately bought a schooner in Maine which was shipped to California. He fixed "her up like a ship in a bottle" and sailed whenever possible off the coast. Meanwhile he purchased a big schooner named the Gracie S which he renovated only to be sold. By the end of the 1940s, he had purchased, refurbished and sold a series of ships leaving only a 45 ton Norwegian ketch.

I gave the ketch my favorite name at the time: Outward Bound. She was my mistress, though she was old and tired, and only her name held promise. We made a proper pair.

The 1950s were both professionally productive and personally challenging for Hayden. The decade started with a professional breakthrough when MGM's top director, John Huston, cast him in the film noir hit *Asphalt Jungle*. As a later film historian explained, it was an A level picture with a B level look that had "no stars except Sterling Hayden, who was hardly a major one." In a 1980 interview for *American Film* magazine, Huston was questioned on why he cast Hayden.

I ask Huston whatever made him cast Sterling Hayden in the lead in *Asphalt Jungle* when Hayden was then simply known as the hunk of man who had married Madeline Carroll. Huston laughs and replies, "I always found Sterling a very interesting man. I used him before he began to blossom. He was known then for his physique other than his talent. But physically, he looked the part of what they call a gorilla the strong man in a robbery."

From 1950 through 1958, Hayden was a lead actor in more than thirty films. After *Asphalt Jungle*, the next memorable role was in *Johnny Guitar* directed by Nicolas Ray and starring Joan Crawford. The film was an unorthodox western with "bluntly presented gender reversals." Crawford and Mercedes Cambridge played tough women while the men, led by Hayden, played gentler types. It was

a difficult time in Hayden's personal life, with his marriage coming apart and his spirit still damaged by his congressional testimony. And the role of a guitar playing gunman was nothing, if not, unusual. As he told a later interviewer.

He felt foolish toting around a guitar. "I can't play guitar and I can't sing." Hayden said to one interviewer. "They put twine on the guitar so, in case I hit it, it wouldn't go plunk."

The film's initial reviews were mixed, but over time it gained popularity as an art film in Europe. Ray, who next went on to direct *Rebel Without a Cause*, was interviewed by a French film critic.

When one Frenchman raved to him about *Johnny Guitar*-which Ray himself considered a troublesome career blip he would rather have forgotten-he was stunned. "He almost persuaded me it was a great movie" he joked.

Years after its release the National Film Preservation Board voted to add *Johnny Guitar* to the United States Film Registry, judging it "culturally, historically, and aesthetically important."

Two years later, Hayden received a script called *The Killing*. It was written by, and slated to be produced and directed by, a new talent named Stanley Kubrick. It was his first Hollywood film and his biographer recounted how Hayden came to play the role of the tough leader of a race track heist gang. Hayden's agent called Kubrick's partner and this conversation ensued.

I represent Sterling Hayden. We like your script a lot, but who is Stanley Kubrick? It's not Stanley Kramer you're talking about...No it's Stanley Kubrick...I never heard of him...but we like your script a lot. Well, Kubrick is terrific and so you're saying that Sterling would like to do the film? He said, 'You know if you make an offer.' What's Sterling's price? He gets \$40,000.

The movie became a noir classic and Kubrick went on to be a legendary director.

The last of Hayden's 1950 films was *Terror in a Texas Town*, a B movie remake of *High Noon* with a script written by Dalton Trumbo, one of the original Hollywood blacklisted writers. In one of the weirdest scenes of any western, Hayden wins

the final confrontation by hurling a whaling harpoon faster than the villain can draw his gun and shoot. One wonders if this scene, which parodies Hayden's seafaring history, was Trumbo's revenge for Hayden's friendly testimony.

Throughout the 1950s, Hayden was determined to maintain his stature as a sailor rather than a mere yachtsman. Sailors were true creatures of the oceans while yachtsmen were the rich playing with their money. And Hollywood was full of rich yachtsmen and their sailing stories. In his memoir, *Salad Days*, Douglas Fairbanks remembered his first cabin cruiser that he'd sold on only to see it used by its new owner in the Dunkirk evacuation. Errol Flynn's memoir, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, talks about his early days working on ships off his native Australia and his later purchase of a yacht, the *Sirocco*, which was berthed in Newport Harbor next to movie mogul Jack Warner's sailboat, the *Southward*. Flynn was known more for his womanizing aboard his yacht but held that "The only real wives I have ever had have been my sailing ships." Even the quintessential cowboy John Wayne loved boats and his biographer said he was "far less a cowboy at heart than he was a sailor." His first boat, a seventy-three foot motor sailor, was supplanted by an ex-minesweeper named the *Wild Goose*. Wayne's most recent biography tells the later history of the ship.

In 1991, the *Wild Goose* was purchased by the former owner of the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas. Today, the ship remains a floating shrine to the memory of John Wayne and is available for charter out of Newport Beach. Likewise, the bar at the Balboa Yacht Club in Newport Beach is called Duke's Place, where there is a floor-to-ceiling painting of Wayne at the helm of the *Wild Goose*.

Hayden considered himself a sailor who acted. His mirror image in Hollywood in the 1950's was Humphrey Bogart. Bogart was the A level film noir star to Hayden's B level status. And Bogart also loved to sail. He started with a small power cruiser named *Sluggo* and then switched to racing a 21ft. sloop. In late 1945 he purchased his dream ship, a fifty-four foot yawl he named *Santana*. Bogie and Lauren Bacall spent most non-working weekends aboard *Santana* and

periodically sailed it to the favorite offshore site for Hollywood yachtsmen, Catalina Island.

For longer outings and racing, Bogie had a professional crew including a seasoned sailor named Larry Dudley who went on to write a lovely little remembrance called *Sailing with Bogie*. In the forward to the book, Dudley lists his mates as some of the “finest sailors on the ocean including his long-time friend, Sterling Hayden.” Dudley quotes from a newspaper article that Bogart wrote about Hollywood sailors.

I have tried to exercise restraint and pretend to be nothing more than an actor who sails and not a sailor who acts. This way I don’t tread on the toes of my professional boating friends who after all would be darned unwelcome if they came to Warner Bros and tried to tell me how to play a scene.

As Hayden entered his fourth decade he was working virtually non-stop. He professed to hate acting but was becoming more accomplished even though leading roles in B movies would never lead to stardom. Perhaps most depressingly, with little time left for sailing, Hayden risked crossing the dreaded line between true sailor and yachtsman. In 1958, a bitter divorce concluded with him gaining custody of the four children. Hayden repurchased the big schooner he had previously owned and refurbished. He renamed her the *Wanderer* and hatched a plan to escape Hollywood with his kids on a voyage of discovery and renewal. As Hayden wrote in his autobiography.

To be truly challenging, a voyage, like a life must rest on a firm foundation of financial unrest. Otherwise, you are doomed to a routine traverse, the kind known to yachtsmen, who play with their boats at sea- “cruising” it is called. Voyaging belongs to seamen who cannot, or will not, fit in.

The voyage aboard the *Wanderer* was to be covered as a documentary, not because publicity was a real goal, but because Hayden needed financial support. He found a partial backer, liquidated all his savings and borrowed from friends. In mid-1958, Hayden placed ads in the personal columns of several metropolitan papers looking for “six active and intelligent” young men and women to round out

the crew of seasoned sailors and their families who had already signed on. He received 2000 replies. His ex-wife got wind of his plans and immediately petitioned the court for a restraining order to stop Hayden from taking the children out of the country. After costly litigation, the court ruled in favor of Hayden's ex-wife. Undeterred, Hayden prepared to leave. As 1958 drew to a close, the Wanderer was ready. In his autobiography, he sets the scene.

Poised this night: seven children and thirteen adults; ten tons of water, six tons of fuel, a four-month supply of food; three hundred charts- within the trussed shell of the last merchant-built windjammer to fly the American flag (museum ships excepted).

And in the ship log, on day one, Hayden entered; "Your honor sir, the proposed ocean voyage is no longer enjoined- for the record, that is."

The Wanderer reached Tahiti on March 4, 1959. Hayden had succeeded in sailing to the South Seas with his children but, he hadn't solved the question of what to do next with his life. On October 4, 1959 the Wanderer left Tahiti bound back to San Francisco. After 4450 more miles at sea, she tied up in the San Francisco harbor November 15, 1959. Over the next few weeks, Hayden returned to court to answer for his defiance of the restraining order. In the end, the judge, like most of the Hollywood community and the press, seemed dazzled that Hayden had actually pulled off the trip. He was fined five hundred dollars and sentenced to five days in jail, with jail time suspended.

Hayden was 43 years old when he returned from his ocean voyage. He had a divorce settlement and four children to raise and he still faced making a living in an industry he professed to hate. For the remainder of his life he worked only as necessary to pay the bills. From Stanley Kubrick in *Dr. Strangelove*, to Francis Ford Coppola in *The Godfather*, to Robert Altman in *The Long Goodbye* to Bernardo Bertolucci in *1900*, the greatest directors of the era sought out Hayden for supporting roles in major movies. A film historian summed up Hayden's movie career in an article in *Film Reference* magazine.

Playing such roles as the hired gunman who dies trying to get back to his horses in Kentucky in *The Asphalt Jungle*, the hard boiled leader of a

doomed gang of race track thieves in *The Killing*, and the mad General Ripper who destroys the world in *Dr. Strangelove*, Hayden was fixed in the public mind as the doomed man of conviction, the man who lives and dies by a bizarre and somewhat perverted moral code.

As acting ceased to consume his time, Hayden turned to his long held goal of becoming a writer. In earlier years he worked on screenplays which largely adapted seafaring classics. None lead to actual movies, but they did teach him a lot about writing, especially dialogue. He put that training to use in his autobiography, *The Wanderer*, which was published in 1963 to modest success. In 1976, Hayden published his only novel, *The Voyage*, which followed a group of seamen as they endured a harrowing trip around the bottom of South America. The book mined the experiences and themes of Hayden's life and included a lead character, Simon Harwar, who was a thinly veiled stand-in for Hayden himself. Harwar was a six foot-five inch alcoholic sailor, attached to his mother and worried about being too handsome to be taken seriously as a man. Near the end of the voyage, as he can see that there is little left for him on-shore, he sums up what one suspects Hayden often thought of himself.

Funny that a man could steer three and a half thousand tons of four-mast barque, yet not be able to steer two hundred and thirty pounds of himself.

But what of Hayden and the sea during this period of his life. Since his autobiography ends with the return from Tahiti, we don't know when he sold the *Wanderer* or if it was replaced with another sea going ship. He remarried in 1960 and fathered two more children. His third wife and growing family settled in Connecticut, while he shuttled between home, location work and a canal barge which he purchased in Amsterdam in 1969 and berthed first in Paris and then in the south of France. From sea going adventurer, to captain of a largely stationary barge, was quite a change. In 1982, a German film crew visited Hayden to produce a documentary about his life. Hayden was charming but drunk throughout the filming. He later said that after seeing himself in the film he gave up liquor for marijuana, which he found to be much less addictive. In the

documentary, he reads from Robert Louis Stevenson's travel book *Inland Voyage* to explain his present life on the water.

Of all the creatures of commercial enterprise, a canal barge is by far the most delightful to consider. It may spread its sails, and then you see it sailing high above the treetops and the windmill, sailing on the aqueduct, sailing through the green corn lands: the most picturesque of things amphibious. Or the horse plods along at a footpace as if there were no such thing as business in the world: and the man dreaming at the tiller sees the same spire on the horizon all day long.... There should be many contented spirits on board, for such a life is both to travel and to stay at home.

We don't know the names of all sixteen of Sterling Hayden's boats. But the ones we do know, *Horizon*, *The Quest*, *Outward Bound*, and *the Wanderer* show a man seeking something essential from the sea. And maybe it was what Stevenson found on his canal barge: "to travel and to stay at home." That is what Hayden sought all his life and one can only hope that periodically he found that peace. Hayden died of cancer in 1986. In her book, *By Myself*, Lauren Bacall chronicles the outpouring of grief in Hollywood at the death of Humphrey Bogart. And she quotes a note of condolence she received from Hayden.

There are those who say our maker has things all worked out for us and whatever happens is for the best. There are times when I can't agree and this is one of them.

A life like Sterling Hayden's would have given our maker a healthy task to plan out in advance. Over an amazing seventy years of life, he was an actor and a writer, a war hero and a turncoat, a husband to three and a father to six. But most of all, I suspect he would want to be remembered as a sailor.

