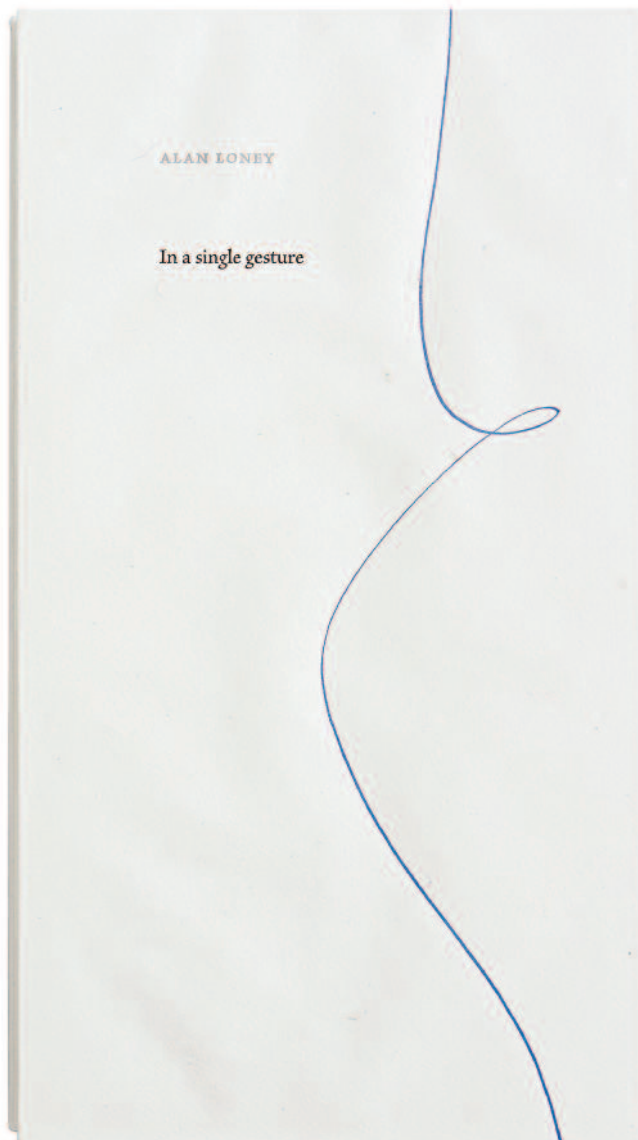
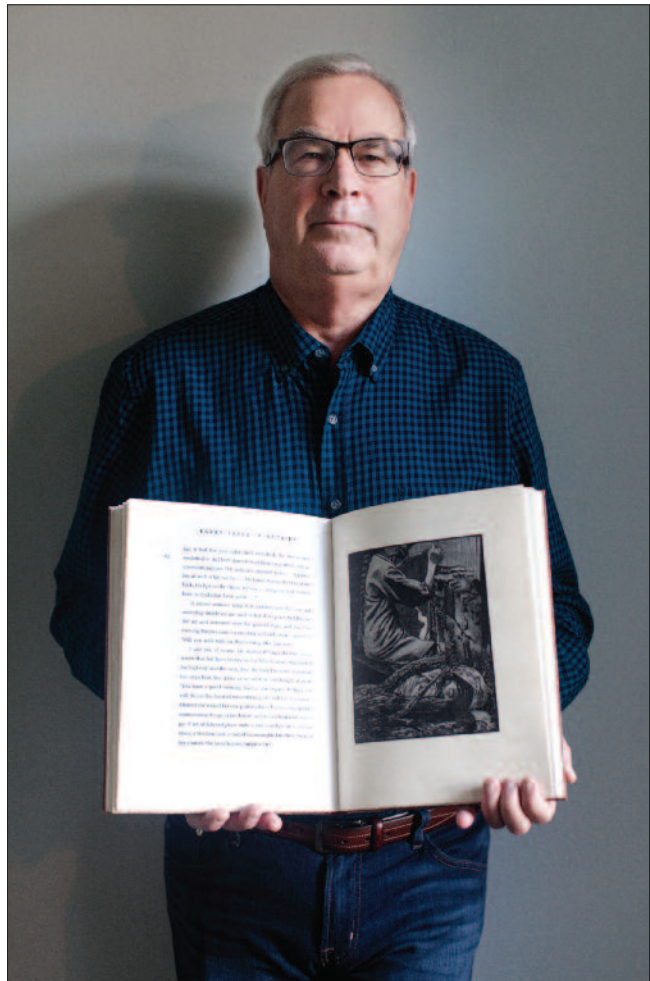


Trimming the sails – David Pascoe’s Nawakum Press

Richard Wagener

In 1973 the John Alden schooner *Dauntless*, built in 1930, sailed out of Santa Barbara, California, and tacked south for what was envisioned as a three month cruise to Baja California for David and John Pascoe. There was no definite plan other than sail for a while, drop anchor, then sail on to see what was down the coast just out of sight. David was the navigator using the stars, sun, moon and planets with a sextant to figure out where they were. More than two years later *Dauntless* moored in Miami having spent six months anchored off Costa Rica, then passing through the Panama Canal and on to Cartagena, Colombia and the Caribbean.

David grew up around water and boats, lived on a lake, spent many of his days sailing in Puget Sound, around the San Juan Islands, and up into British Columbia. He acquired his first boat at age ten. His grandmother, living next door



on the lake, a graduate of Stanford University, would regularly take him to the library and helped him develop an appreciation for books and good writing. A neighborhood doctor had a small print shop in his basement and David would spend many hours there fascinated with the printing process.

Later as a freshman at Yale, David was introduced to the head of the Rare Books & Special Collections at the relatively new Beinecke Library. Visits to the exhibitions held at Special Collections gave him a unique introduction to the world of fine press books. He subsequently sought out other residential college presses scattered around the University campus.

After a number of years at sea, and after owning a smaller cutter rigged sloop built in the 1940s, David took to land and settled back in Marin County, just over the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. One day at the library David saw a poster from the Feathered Serpent Press in San Anselmo offering classes in bookmaking taught by Don Kelly, its proprietor. David signed up and began learning how to hand set type, print and bind books. His enthusiasm led to acquiring

a Colts Armory press and a Chandler & Price treadle press for his own projects and he moved north to Sebastopol. Here, in 1979, Nawakum Press was born. The imprint took its name from the Pacific Northwest Native American name for 'gently flowing waters'. Nawakum was meaningful in that it was from the region where he grew up, and it was from people who honored storytelling, held a reverence for the land and the water that nourished it.

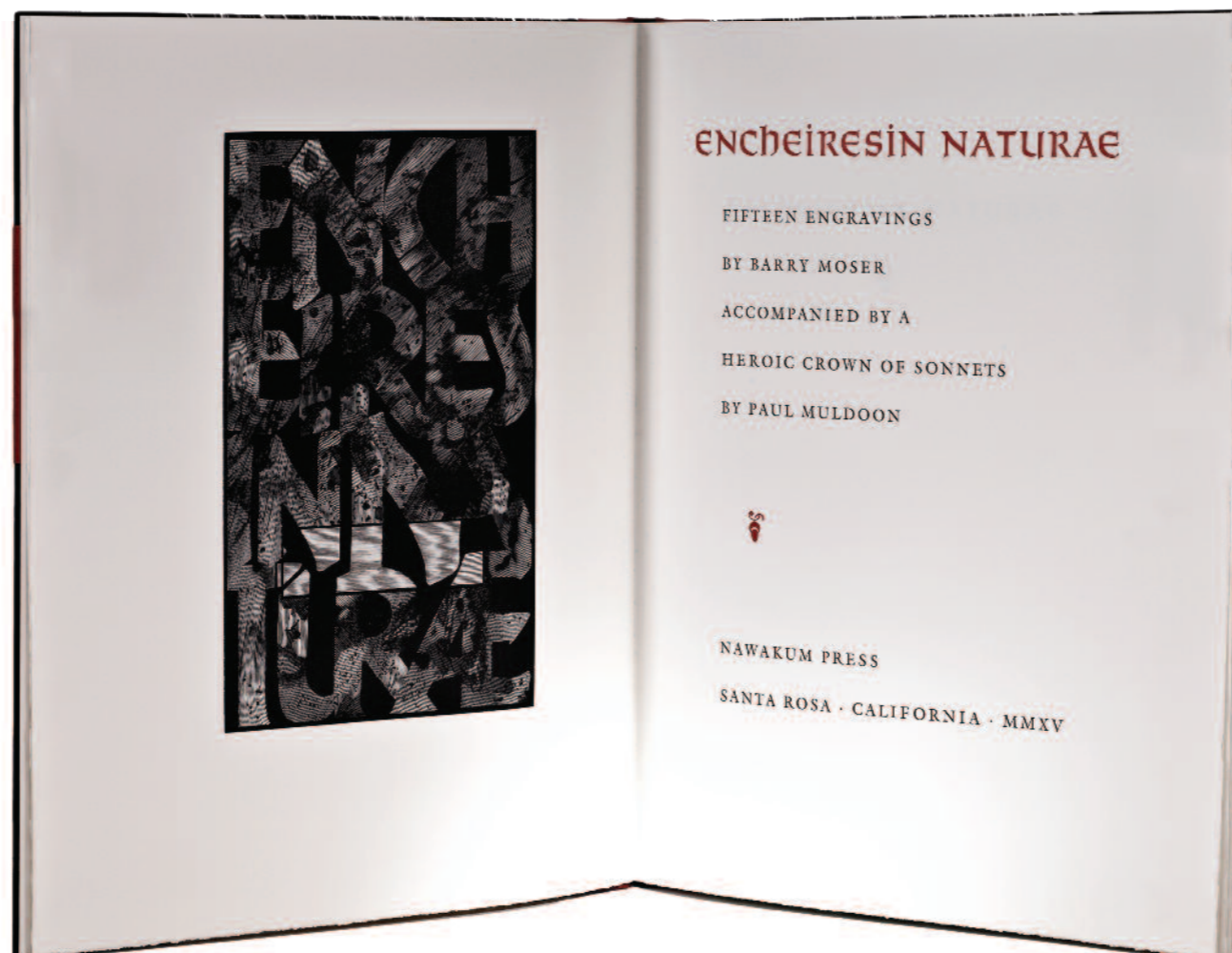
Life takes one on many different paths. To support a growing family, David started a printing brokerage business where he managed large scale commercial printing projects for advertising agencies where press runs often ran into the millions of units. This left little time for private press activities. Eventually the presses and shop equipment were sold and personal projects were put on long term hold.

The yearning to print and publish books never went away and when the printing industry went digital, the commercial printing landscape changed and David found he had more time to think about what kind of printing he really wanted to be involved with. Nawakum Press was reborn in 2009 and instead of acquiring new equipment and doing all the press-work, David decided to make this a collaborative adventure where he could work with the artists, printers and book binders he admired and who seemed to be producing the most accomplished work that fitted in with his sensibility.

There are many similarities between sailing and book-making. Sailing can alternate between being tiring and tedious, exhilarating and shocking, sometimes in a matter of minutes. Handfeeding handmade paper into a letterpress can have its ups and downs. All is going well until it isn't. With sailing you often have to head directly into the wind to get to where you are going, and in doing so, you might have to travel five miles to get just a half mile ahead. It is not for someone in a hurry. Book projects often take years to map out and travel with setbacks on the way. It tends to go slower than you first imagine. Slow and steady works in both cases unless you are facing a Papagayo wind off the coast of Nicaragua which can go from a zephyr to almost hurricane velocity in a matter of minutes.

It seems natural, then, that for the first publication of the resurrected Nawakum Press David would choose to print Rachel Carson's essay *Undersea* which first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1937. To complement the essay he went to one of the finest illustrators in the Bay Area, Dugald Stermer, who did a variety of illustrative work for *Time* magazine, *Ramparts*, and of particular interest to David his work for *Oceans Magazine* back in the 1960s.

From there David found poems by Robert Bly, the Poet Laureate of Minnesota that he paired with wood engravings



by Berkeley artist Keith Cranmer, and published as *The Indigo Bunting*. Then there was a return to sea with *The Chola Widow* by Herman Melville which was part of *The Encantadas*, writings based upon his island adventures.

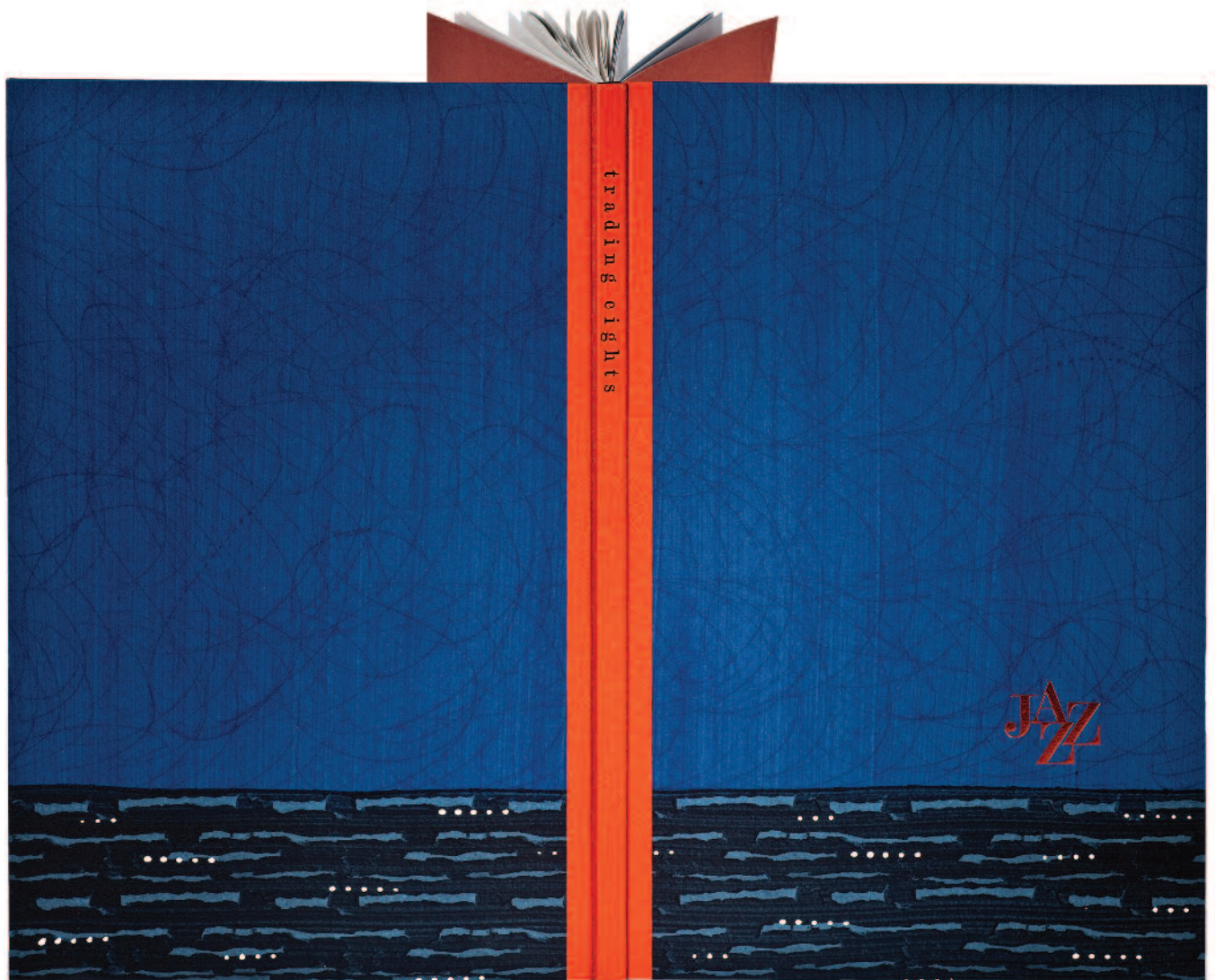
I met David at the 2011 Codex Book Fair and Symposium in Berkeley, California. As it turned out David lived about twenty minutes north of me off Highway 101. A couple of months later we had lunch together and David inquired if I was interested in working on a project together. I was, but the ideas that came up didn't seem right for me. After a number of meetings I suggested that we wait and see what I was working on in a year or so and maybe there would be something that resonated with us both.

Right before the 2013 Codex Book Fair I happened to make three drawings that I wanted to pursue as a book project. At the Codex Symposium I heard a talk by Alan Loney that seemed to be comparable in tone with what I was thinking. Afterward, I approached Alan about collaborating on this venture, and he agreed. When I had completed fourteen of the engravings, I remembered my commitment to David and invited him over to the studio to see what I was up to. David had recently published *In a Single Gesture*, a poem by Alan. When David saw the series of engravings and learned that Alan would be writing a poem to accompany the images, he immediately indicated that he wanted to participate in this adventure.

What I found out about David is how focused he is with a creative mind that is constantly coming up with ideas. Many times I would receive emails late at night and David would present some ideas that just came to him. What if we did this? What if we did that? He was continually thinking about how to make this project as grand as possible.

John Steinbeck didn't believe in collaborations. In *East of Eden*, he speculated that 'Nothing was ever created by two men... There are no good collaborations, whether in music, in art, in poetry, in mathematics, in philosophy. Once the miracle of creation has taken place, the group can build and extend it, but the group never invents anything'.

I believe Steinbeck somewhat walked back this idea. In 1940 he sailed with his friend Ed Ricketts on a journey into the Gulf of California to collect invertebrate specimens. In 1951 the narrative portion of the *Log from the Sea of Cortez* contained a record of many discussions between the two men. After the book came out, Steinbeck couldn't remember which part of a discussion he contributed, and which part was contributed by Ricketts. This clearly describes the way David and I worked together on this book and how the result is a mélange of ideas from both of us. Our collaboration became *Loom*, co-published in 2014 by David's Nawakum



Press and my Mixolydian Editions, & had its debut at Codex Australia in Melbourne. In 2016 this book was awarded the Carl Hertzog prize for Excellence in Book Design from the University of Texas at El Paso.

David and I worked together in 2016 when I was moved to publish the wood engraved jazz portraits by James Todd of Missoula, Montana. He was able to bring a vision of design to bear on the ideas we were discussing about trying to recreate a sense of what it might have been like to see these jazz icons playing in small clubs back in 1959. We were able to get jazz historian Ted Gioia to write an essay for us, and then to get his brother, Dana Gioia, California's Poet Laureate, to write a poem. This book, *Trading Eights*, was again a co-publication of the two presses.

In choosing what to publish, David looks for material that resonates with him on both an intellectual as well as spiritual level. There must be a deep connection with some aspect of the material and the author. As a publisher David conceives the idea of the book and then starts bringing onboard the players who will make it all come together. This begins with the writer and the artist, and then the printer and the binder. When overseeing a project, David sees himself not so much

as the captain of the ship, but rather the navigator. As David himself puts it, 'I set a course for the project and then help update the collaborators as they contribute their all-important parts'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NAWAKUM PRESS

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In a Single Gesture, Alan Loney and Judy Detrick, 2012
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