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Lawrence Tarprah holds a marine worm he harvested at low tide in Stratford. Photo: Griffin O'Neill

From the EDITOR

Pitchfork in hand, Lawrence Tarprah mines the mud flats exposed at low tide on the Stratford shore, not far from his home in Bridgeport.

The treasures he seeks are creatures often considered lowly or unlovable, especially compared to more animated species like dolphins, elephants and panda bears. But the slithery brown beasts he harvests—marine worms—are the key ingredient for his favorite pursuit.

“I do it for fishing, almost any time I want to go fishing,” said Tarprah, 68, who emigrated from Ghana 30 years ago. “The bait stores sell them for quite a sum, so I do this to save some money.”

Recently retired from a career as a hospice nurse, he spent many hours tending to the dying and their families, using medicine and compassion to lessen their physical and emotional pain through what he calls “the transition.” He’s witnessed young and old patients go peacefully, and too many others who left this world still full of resentment and anger. Angling from shore or off the side of a charter boat has long been his antidote to the suffering he tried to ease.

“I fish for anything that bites—porgy, striped bass,” he said. “I catch a limited amount—just enough for me to eat fresh, and if I have an extra, I give it to my girlfriend or a friend.”

Early this spring he was looking forward to spending as much time as possible in the coming months collecting worms and catching fish.

“Now I’ll be able to go fishing almost any time I want,” he said.

It’s his way of finding joy by interacting with the sea and other creatures, pursued with an attitude of restraint and appreciation the writer Wendell Berry would find admirable.

In his essay “A Native Hill,” written in 1968 long before the perils of climate change were widely appreciated, Berry expressed what is at stake when we lose contact with nature. Regardless of whether you, like Berry, ascribe a divine hand to the wonders of the world, his words call us to be attentive and respectful of other creatures and the land, ready to experience admiration for their ways of survival and renewal.

“...we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it,” Berry said. “We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.”

In this issue of *Wrack Lines*, the stories of scientists, divers, a painter, expert gardener and shellfish enthusiasts are offered to help stir our awe for the creatures that inhabit the Earth with us. From tiny copepods to majestic birds, industrious insects to otherworldly marine creatures and thriving oyster communities, the various animals have inspired fascination and even passion in the people profiled who are paying close attention to them.

But you don’t have to be an ardent researcher or devoted artist to know the rewards of closely observing animals. We can all learn and be spiritually richer by looking outside the human sphere and admitting that our reality alone doesn’t tell all of Earth’s story.



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Cover photo: A large-eyed feather duster worm is one of the many creatures Robert Bachand photographed during more than 40 years of diving in Long Island Sound. Photo: Robert Bachand