

CHANGING PLACES

TRUE STORIES FROM
WOMEN ON THE WATER

EDITED BY SHELLEY WRIGHT
AND JACKIE PARRY

TIME TO ADJUST

JESSIE MACKELPRANG-CARTER

This short story was scribbled on a notebook page, while riding public transportation, roughly two months after we made landfall in Victoria at the end of a 22-month cruising voyage from Seattle to Melbourne.

Melbourne whirs by, a colorful blur of automobiles and shops and passersby. I'm seated on a tram that is bumping down Glenferrie Road on a late summer afternoon. It's nearly 30 degrees Celsius outside. I feel the vibration of the rails through the heels of my black pumps.

My eyes shift from face to face in the crammed car filled with rush hour commuters, but there are no eyes to meet mine.

I feel alone.

I try to force a smile from the blond across from me, a corporate girl with a mustard yellow purse, a tired button-down blouse, and sad eyes. I fail. She sees her smartphone but not me.

Returning to the digitized, heavily populated but under-connected circus of city life, I feel achingly alone. My mind is tugged toward a hundred moments where I felt connected to my brothers and sisters in humanity during our voyage across the Pacific from the United States to Australia. I bonded with people whose language I did not speak and whose customs I knew not,

but who smiled at me and we attempted to communicate anyway.

Cities are all still the same. It is me who is now different.

And I'm scared.

I'm afraid that I've changed too much. Too much to feel a sense of wholeness in having unlimited access to everything money can buy because I know that feeling connected to myself and others is free of charge and all that really matters.

I found completeness out there, with the sea.

I felt less lonely a thousand miles from land, awake on watch in the middle of the night while my husband slept, than I do right now.

What if I no longer care about any of this – career, things, money? What if I've ruined myself by having experiences so profound on our voyage that nothing else can lift me to such heights or expand my heart to such fullness?

Breathe.

Inhale. Exhale.

Reintegrating into civilization is far more difficult for me than cutting ties with it and setting sail. Perhaps I just need time to adjust. Time to build meaning here in this new city in this new country. To find me here. To create a me here.

Breathe.