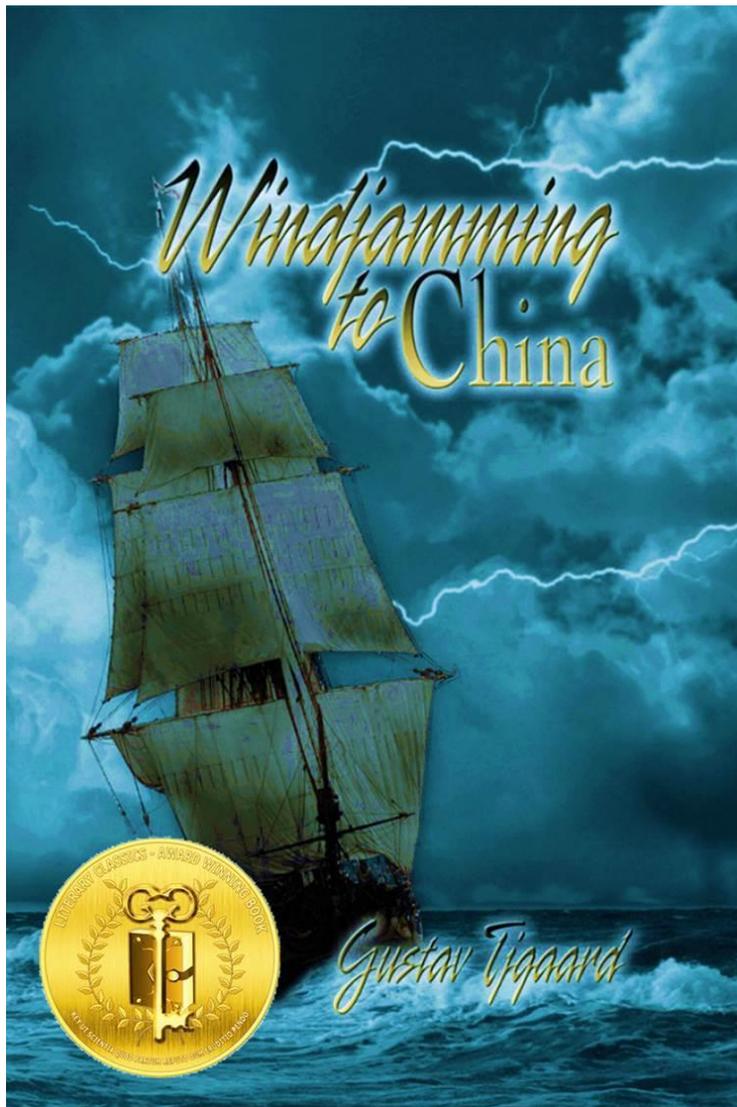


Riding the intrepid waves of sea, land and wilderness An interview with author Gustav Tjgaard

Written by Jean Bartlett, October, 2017

"Consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself?" ~ Herman Melville, Moby Dick.

Shortly after the December 2011 release of his sea-driven historic nonfiction novel "Windjamming to China," the book's prolific author Gustav Tjgaard was featured on the Pacifica Historical Society's award-winning television series *Footprints of Pacifica*. The episode was hosted by Pacifican [David Hirzel](#). David, a tall ship and heroic era historian as well as a multi-published playwright, poet and novelist, asked the author what his reasons were for writing this book – a book which went on to land the coveted Literary Classics Seal of Approval.



"It was my ambition in writing 'Windjamming to China,' to make the sea, the sailor and his ship, legitimate literary subjects by associating them with man's intrinsic fascination and challenge with the mystery of the vast ocean, in my case, the Pacific," Gustav began. "I believe that there resides in the human subconscious a profound and innate nostalgic connection with the salt sea. After all, the waters of the ocean and the amniotic water of our mother's womb are identical. The mineral content of the ocean and its ionic balance is exactly that of the optimum healthy human blood, amniotic fluid, lymphatic fluid and cellular fluid. The human embryo lives in this oceanic environment obtaining a growth of three billion times its original weight. This cognitively precise similarity between the human fluids and the ocean has been recognized since antiquity. (Greek historian) Heradotus wrote of this subject matter in 408 BCE. So, of course, even if unrecognized, there is little wonder that there exists in the somewhat loquacious depths of the human soul a nostalgic longing for home and for the sea salt origins.

Gustav, who did not begin writing or doing art until he retired at 79, in 2004, and moved with his wife Sono to Pacifica, California, is currently working on his eighth book, a novella, which he plans to finish by year end. "I have to do something in my retirement," the celebrated writer laughed.

Gustav was born in his father's boatyard which was located on Decatur Island, one of the 172 named islands and reefs of the San Juan Archipelago which is located in the northwest corner of the contiguous United States and is part of the state of Washington. Located between the U.S. mainland and Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, the islands are home to a variety of residents which include: osprey, bald eagles, harlequin ducks, peregrine falcons, harbor seals, harbor porpoises, river otters, black-tail deer, silver foxes, and the noble pass through of gray whales, humpback whales and pilot whales. The islands have a temperate climate year-round and in the 2000 census, Decatur Island had a human headcount of seventy-one.

"I was born in 1925 and I am the only child of Charles and Lillian Tjgaard," Gustav noted. "My father was from Sweden and my mother, who was more Swedish than my father, is the daughter of two Swedes. Only very recently I discovered that she most likely romanticized her origins and was born in Colorado rather than Sweden. While that is still under investigation, what remains true is that after my parents married they moved to Vancouver, Canada."

"But all their lives they had a built-in hatred of England," Gustav laughed clearly not agreeing with this thinking on his parents' part. "If it was English it was bad. They went from Canada to the United States in a very short span of time because of that reason. Vancouver is almost within walking distance of Decatur Island. But still, once they got to the United States, 'Phew. What a relief!' My father was a relatively serious fellow. My mother used to complain constantly about every picture that came out about royalty and she said, 'Queen Mary has not changed her hat. That's the same hat she had in 1914.' My mother was outraged by this hat behavior!"

A second cousin to Queen Victoria, the great granddaughter of George III, and the daughter of Duke Francis and Duchess Mary of Teck, Queen Mary was born Victoria Mary Augusta Louise Olga Pauline Claudine Agnes Mary in Kensington Palace in May of 1867 and died in Marlborough House in London in 1953. This span of years undoubtedly gave Gustav's mother a well-received supply of fuel for her outrage.

Something very important to know about Gustav's family is in regards to their last name, Tjgaard. At some point they decided, prior to consulting with Gustav who may have not yet even been born, that Carlson was easier to pronounce than Tjgaard and that Phil (short for Phillip Charles Carlson) was easier than Gustav. There are many folks who only know Gustav as Phil Carlson. But as all of Gustav's books are written by Gustav Tjgaard and illustrated by Phillip Charles Carlson, we are keeping to Gustav.

At their home on Decatur Island, the family only spoke English. Gustav's father was particularly adamant on the subject because he always wanted to improve his English.

"When visitors from Sweden spoke Swedish, my father answered in English. My mother was slightly mortified by this and would quickly answer in Swedish. But my father would call her on that. However sometimes it took a long time for people to understand Dad's English.

"My dad came from a place in geography in Sweden where the Skagerrak and the Kattegat meet. These are narrow waters that separate Denmark from Sweden and Norway – and they go from the North Sea into the Baltic Sea. This is the area where all the ships for the Vikings were built. My father came from a long line of boat builders. He was also one of a number of siblings and he was not the eldest son. Advancement in the business went to the eldest son and this is why he left, for the promise of a better life."

At his boatyard on Decatur Island, Gustav's father built fishing boats and pleasure boats for customers from Puget Sound and Alaska. He was a craftsman, a shipwright.

"The island is located in Puget Sound and at that time the salmon industry was one of the major industries in the Sound along with lumber. They had the largest salmon cannery in Bellingham, Washington, which was in fact, the largest in the United States. The cannery had what was called lines, 12 of them. What that means is that fish go in one way and come out at the end of the line in a can. Now this is not done this way anymore. But back then each line had people at one end that gutted the salmon and cut the fins and the head off. Next in line were the slimers. They put the salmon under running water to scrape them and get the slime off. Then you had the person who worked the iron chink machine which cut the fish into sizes that could go into the can, and so on."

"My father's boat building industry was vast," Gustav added with great seriousness. "Sometimes he had four or five people working in his yard!"

At an age too young to remember, Gustav learned how to swim.

"I fell in love with the water very young because I lived in such an ideal place to do so. It is the banana belt of the State of Washington and it has a warm Japanese current. There are hundreds and hundreds of islands and all in close proximity to each other. There were always whales and dolphins going by. It was a wonderful place to learn how to swim and to sail. Sailing here in San Francisco, there is no place to go. But there you could go from one island to another. Orcas Island is the largest of the San Juan Islands and there was a mansion on the island that I was taken with because the gentleman there had a pipe organ." The Moran Mansion with its pipe organ is still there and still in use.

By the time he was 5, Gustav could handle a rowboat.

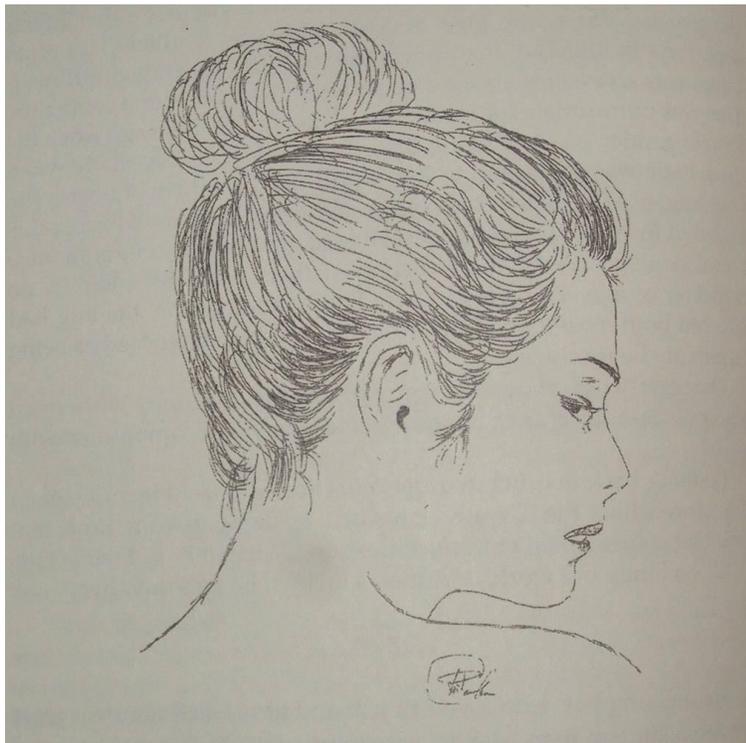
"When I was a little older I would see an abandoned boat and I would say to my dad, 'Can I have that?' Of course I had to take it and clean it up – patch it and paint it – relatively simple things. But my father would acquiesce. Then my mother would see me and go into a towering rage! 'Did your father tell you, you could have that?' 'Dad gave me this boat.' 'Are you crazy,' she would say to Dad and he would say, 'He can swim!'"

School on the Island was a one-room schoolhouse, first grade through eighth grade. Mrs. Cain was everyone's teacher.

"Sometimes we had as many as 10 or 13 kids in the school and Mrs. Cain was a strict disciplinarian. She had to keep order somehow."

Gustav said his mother thought Mrs. Cain was a fantastic teacher until "the incident."

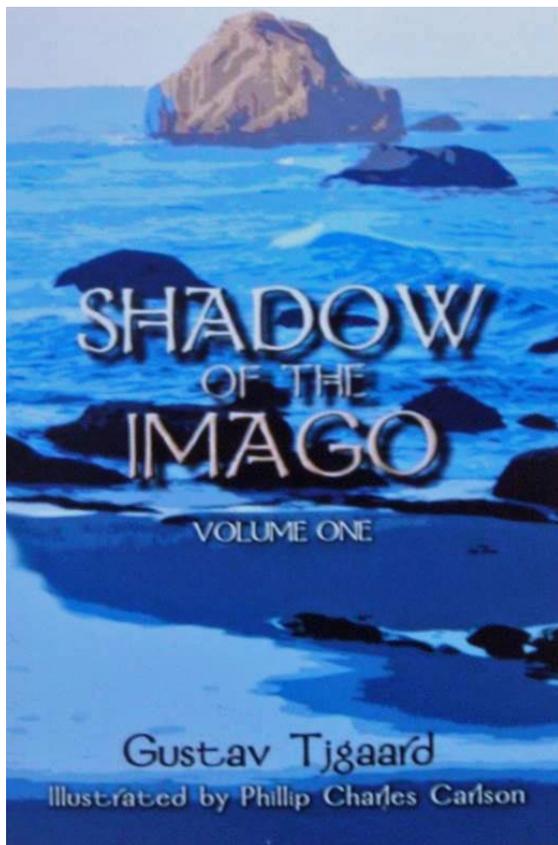
"The background to this story is my mother thought that people who were Catholic were evil, not just misguided, but evil!" Gustav laughed heartily. "One time Mrs. Cain took us to Bellingham on a field trip. But then she had the gall to take us to visit a Catholic cathedral in Bellingham. Mrs. Cain said, 'It's beautiful, we'll just go inside.' My mother just blew when she found out. She wrote letters to the County School Board and was thinking of writing to the Governor. Something so obviously detrimental to a child's education! She thought Mrs. Cain was such a nice person, but she hated her after that. She was ruining the morals of the children. Thankfully Mrs. Cain wasn't English on top of this. But I still went to school there, because there was no other school."



Gustav's best friend was Zoë. She was also Swedish. Her father worked for Gustav's father and together at the boatyard, Gustav and Zoë learned their skills of boat repair and sailing. He recalled that it was his dad's passionate love of fly fishing that would provide the answer as to what to get Zoë for her birthday.

"My dad's main hobby was fly fishing. He loved it. You had to cast just so. He had Izaak Walton's (1653-published) book 'The Compleate Angler.' Fly fishing of course was supposed to be fun so my father had to do it by the numbers.

"I remember Zoë was going to have a birthday and I said Dad, 'What can I get Zoë for her birthday?' 'Well,' Dad said, 'We'll get her a fly rod!' 'Naturally,' I thought somewhat sarcastically. 'What else would I get her?' But we did get her that and Zoë loved it.



In the early years of their teens, nearing graduation from Mrs. Cain's school of discipline, Gustav and Zoe decided they would go on a sailboat adventure of a lifetime, just within the neighboring islands. One sailed a 12-foot sailboat and the other an 18-foot. Both were good sailors and had gone on solo sailing adventures before. Gustav had told his father they were sailing together. Zoe had not told her father and snuck out.

"We were gone three or four days but that was not extraordinary because a gale would come up and you had to go ashore. We fished as we went. I didn't know it, nor did she, but we were probably head over heels. When we returned, while my father had not voiced any objections originally, her father was wondering if he should shoot me. My mother had not known about this and she was worse than Zoe's dad.

"Things deteriorated after that," Gustav recalled with a laugh.

In 2007, Gustav published "Shadow of the Imago ~ Volume One," a memoir of an adolescent year in the Arcadian San Juan Archipelago of Puget Sound where two young teens "learn something of love and life." (*Available on [Amazon](#) and through the author's [Rum Ram Ruf Blog](#) as well as his [website](#).*)

Gustav's father decided that since his son had completed his elementary school education, he was ready, more or less, for a secondary school education.

"To this end I was enrolled in the Augustana Maritime Academy," Gustav writes in "Windjamming to China," a memoir written in the voice of a 15-year-old boy, covering his experiences and the colorful characters he meets sailing the North Pacific in the late 1930s. "A retired captain, Arvid Hawkins was the Academy's master (autocrat). He was a properly serious, severe, austere man. He was a Lutheran of the evangelical-fundamentalist species, a religious who resided on the extreme edge of Christian fundamentalist belief."

"In the continuing story of my penance, let me introduce my father's friend Captain Melberg," Gustav laughed. "Melberg was the Captain of the Vigilant and like my father he too was an autocrat."

The Vigilant was a five-masted American cargo schooner with a 262 ft. waterline length, 48 ft. beam and 23.5 ft. draft. The ship travelled between Bellingham, Washington and Guangzhou (Canton), China, and she was the last and the largest of the great commercial windjammers ever built in the United States.

"This was the Depression years of the late 1930s and the age for being an official seaman was 15. I was 13. But my father figured that one out. One day he summoned me to the dock and I went down the gangplank to meet him. He took out an envelope from his inside coat pocket, opened it, and took my birth certificate from the envelope. 'I found a little error on your birth certificate,' he told me with a wink of his eye. 'Some clerk put in the wrong year of your birth. But it isn't a problem. I made the correction.' And with that he showed me some ink eradicator that he had carefully used to eliminate the last digit of the year of my birth, changing the '5' to a '3.' 'Now that I've corrected that typo you're 15,' he said. 'Do you feel older?'"

This was how Gustav's dad distanced the two teens from any social indiscretions. Gustav was sent off for five years to serve as ship's boy on the Vigilant.

"A ship's boy can be 50 years old. It simply means the least experienced person on board. You get all the awful jobs."

While Captain Melberg may have been a personal friend of Gustav's father, he would never go so low as to speak to a crewman. If he wanted you to do something, he told the first mate.

"He would brook not the slightest whisper questioning his authority," Carlson recalled with a laugh. "In fact he instructed the first mate that not only was I not to receive even a hint of preferential treatment, I was to receive the opposite sort of treatment. I was to be toughened up by hard work and rough use. But the captain further instructed the mate that he would not tolerate even a hint of abuse. The first mate was a great brute of a man whose mere growl could put the fear of God into even the most unregenerate salt aboard. So I was worked until I dropped."

Before the Vigilant sailed, the first mate – who must be heard over wind and sea – shouted at Gustav, "Top of the mast. Now!"

"This was about a 180- or 190-foot climb and then up at the top it had braces to the cross-tree and you had to go around the outside. (The cross-trees are either secured to the top before sending it aloft, or sent up by means of the girtlines first.) He just wanted to show me that I would have to do things that might be the first time and they might look as dangerous as hell but so what, I had to do them anyway. These were the same rules for every crewman. I was scared. But I did it because I was more scared of the first mate."

Gustav met a great many colorful characters aboard the Vigilant and learned his share of jobs which included: cutting and fitting standing rigging, fitting and reeving running riggings, bending and unbending sails, making and taking in sails and the general principles of working a ship and tack. By the end of the first voyage, Gustav began to be regarded by the crew as almost worthy of being titled a "tar."

The Vigilant carried approximately 200 million feet of lumber to Guangzhou then returned with cargo. The ship and the ship's boy were gone for months at a time. Each time Gustav came home briefly to his Washington island, he was home-schooled until he went out again.

"During one of the times I was gone, Zoë drowned. She had gone out solo on a small boat and got caught in a storm. She was very young, about 16."

When the Second World War broke out, Gustav signed up for the 515th Airborne (U.S. Army).

"I was very young and Army pay was very large: \$50.00 a month! The recruiters for the 515th paratroops said, 'We'll double your salary if you sign up.' One hundred dollars, I went for it!" Gustav fought in France and Belgium.

"There was a strict military policy," Gustav noted with a great deal of seriousness. "No fraternizing with the locals. That was absolutely forbidden. If you did meet someone, you absolutely couldn't marry her and bring her back to the United States. If you tried any of this, there would be severe consequences."

"I met Shirley in Paris. We married in Europe. She came back to America with me with all the war brides. She spoke almost no English but of course she learned it immediately and probably spoke it better than I did! I was lucky to escape France before her father caught up with me. He had said to me, 'Of course you are a good Catholic?' And I said, 'No.' "

The couple settled in Alaska. Shirley made the transition from Paris to Alaska with no problem. Gustav worked in the salmon industry.

"After the War, I went to college in Fairbanks. I studied mining. It was called School of Mines! That was the big interest at the time. I never did any mining or even looked for a job in that field. I went to the Tlingit village where there were no mines, but there was fishing. I did maintenance work at the cannery. Then I ran the commissary for the fishermen. Then I ran the oil dock. All of this was in the center of the Tongass National Forest. The native people were then still quite primitive. They would come to the dock with a bunch of money in their hand to buy what they needed. They didn't have any idea what a one dollar bill was or a five dollar bill, etc."

After 25 years of marriage, Shirley and Gustav divorced. "My fault," Gustav said.

By then, Gustav was very involved in Tlingit politics and was elected to six successive school board terms. He was also elected mayor of Kake, Alaska.

"I was very passionate in politics. For instance, when the church arrived in the 1920s, the church and the government (the BIA - Bureau of Indian Affairs) wanted the Native Alaskans to assimilate. I thought that was absolutely terrible. They had them burn their costumes and destroy their totem poles. When I was the mayor I told

the natives, 'Forget this assimilation and let's build a totem pole. Let's make it the tallest totem pole in the world.' And they did it."

The abbreviated history here is in 1926, a wrong-thinking missionary convinced Kake tribal leaders to destroy what he termed "pagan objects." With heavy hearts they burned their totem poles to the ground. While other missionaries recognized a horrible error had been made, nothing changed until 1967. That was the Alaska Purchase Centennial and finances were raised to build a new Kake totem pole. The 132-foot Kake totem pole was built by the Chilkat tribe.

"It is considered very gauche to build a totem pole for yourself."

The totem pole was presented at Expo 70, the world fair held in Osaka, Japan, in September of 1970, and was raised over Kake in 1971.



In this photo, an Indian carving is presented to Wally Hickel the Governor of Alaska. Gustav (Kake Mayor Phil Carlson) is behind him, fourth from the left. Not long after this photo was taken, Governor Hickel became the Secretary of the Interior under President Richard Nixon and served from 1969 to 1970. Hickel would govern Alaska again, but earlier on, in 1965, he built Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage, following the 1964 earthquake that leveled most of downtown Anchorage. His timing was to prove that there should be no hesitation to rebuild in Anchorage and he definitely inspired. Circa, 1968.

Money to build the Kake totem pole was raised through \$1 shares under the direction of the Southeast Indian Heritage Cooperative. Twenty-five shares of capital stock were bought by Sonoko Mori of Japan.

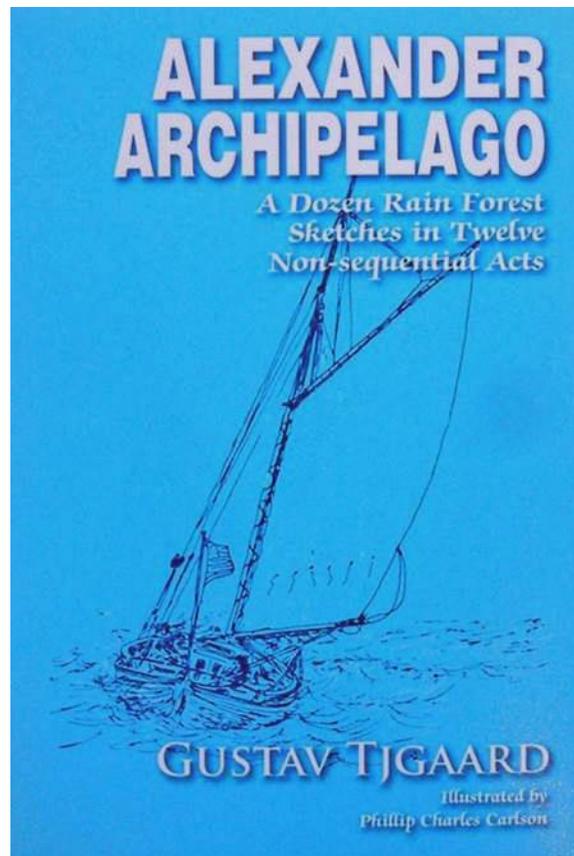
"I met Sono when I worked for Kiku Canning in Kake. I took care of the fish and marketing the fish and Sono was secretary to the president of the company in Japan. She spoke English and all of our correspondence came through her.

"Prior to Kiku Canning, the innards of the fish were dumped into what we called a candy wagon which was a barge, and that in turn was taken out to sea and tipped over to release all contents. When Japan recovered from the War, they were very interested in salmon egg caviar and so they came into Kake and managed what they needed. Only

they knew how to treat the salmon eggs so that it would be marketable in Japan. It had to have a certain amount of brine. Salmon from the ocean had eggs with this amount of salt in them and those you fetched closer to the river had less salt in them. The Japanese company had to be like whiskey tasters. They had to make sure the eggs conformed to the highest taste radiant in Japan." Gustav convinced Sono to come to Alaska. "We met and that was it." They have been married 49 years.

"We have a wonderful daughter who is smarter than both her mother and her father. This was true even when she was small."

They lived on Baranof Island, which is located in northern Alexander Archipelago in the Alaska Panhandle. Gustav had many years of familiarity with the Alexander Archipelago, a 300-mile long group of islands (archipelago) of which the vast majority are part of the Tongass National Forest. The third book he wrote and published in his retirement – "Alexander Archipelago: A Dozen Rain Forest Sketches in Twelve Non-sequential Acts" – offers nonfiction narrative dramatizations "set in the lush ambiance and grandeur of earth's largest temperate rainforest."



For this book, Phillip Charles Carlson did somewhere between 30 and 40 illustrations.

"The book is a picture album of life in Alaska's Tongass National Forest," a book review reads. "Its adventures and perilous undertakings occur in a forest of big trees, big birds, big fish, and big bears, where immense peaks are wrapped in great glaciers that break off into bays and fjords where big whales spout. The peaks are capped by perennial snows that form the highest coastal mountain range in the world, rising abruptly from salty coves to blue ice and black crags. Surely this is landscape to swell the soul and humble the ego." (Visit Goodreads, to travel a sweeping video of the book and the Alexander Archipelago: <https://www.goodreads.com/videos/73930-alexander-archipelago-trailer>.)

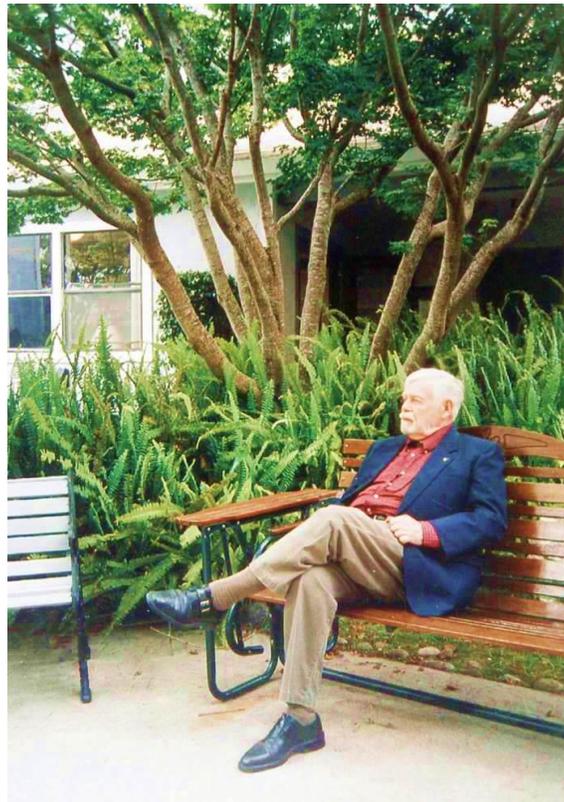
"Sono did not like Baranof Island. There are several reasons but the first is a rather large one.

"One evening Sono was sitting in a chair reading with the window over her shoulder open. She heard a noise and she turned around and there was a big Brown Bear with his paws on the sill and he was looking at her. Sono let me know that that was too close. But I explained he wasn't interested in eating a tiny thing like her. She was like an hors d'oeuvres. She additionally did not care for the lack of people. So we went to Seattle, Washington to give it the once-over as a possible place to live. As such we took a room in mid-Seattle. It's Saturday morning and Sono is looking out the window and down on the streets. 'Where are the people who live in Seattle? Are they on a picnic today or something?' I didn't know where they were but I knew that Seattle didn't cut it. So we went to San Francisco. That was 47 years ago. I got a job right away managing an apartment downtown. Then I got into property management and then I also became a receiver for the Superior Court of Marin. That was a tough job because I was in court at least once or twice a week because property goes into receivership if there is divorce and they can't divide it – so the court divides it. That can take two or three years with each person's lawyer fighting the other person's lawyer."

In addition, Gustav got a job through a Help Wanted ad in a Sacramento newspaper. A Greek yachtsman needed a captain for his ship.

"I applied and was hired. It was for the St. Francis Yacht Club. The owner of the yacht, the Greek, was an absolute terror. The good parts were he couldn't travel on his boat because he got too seasick and all he was interested in was fishing, which is why I got the job. He liked to game fish. My job was to put the boat in the spots where there were fish. He had a beach craft and a pilot. One time we were in a village in Mexico, just north of Acapulco. I told him, 'We have to discuss a vacation.' He was amazed. 'Every God damned day of your life, is a vacation,' he replied. He was a jerk, a wealthy jerk.

"When I retired about 14 years ago, we moved to Pacifica and I started writing. My first book was 'Shadow of the Imago.' The second book was 'Windjamming to China.' I wrote my first book with a great deal of encouragement from Sono. She writes. She writes movie reviews for a Los Angeles Japanese paper and she also constantly sends stories to Japan.



For his 2007 released "Shadow of the Imago," Gustav posed for the book's back jacket.

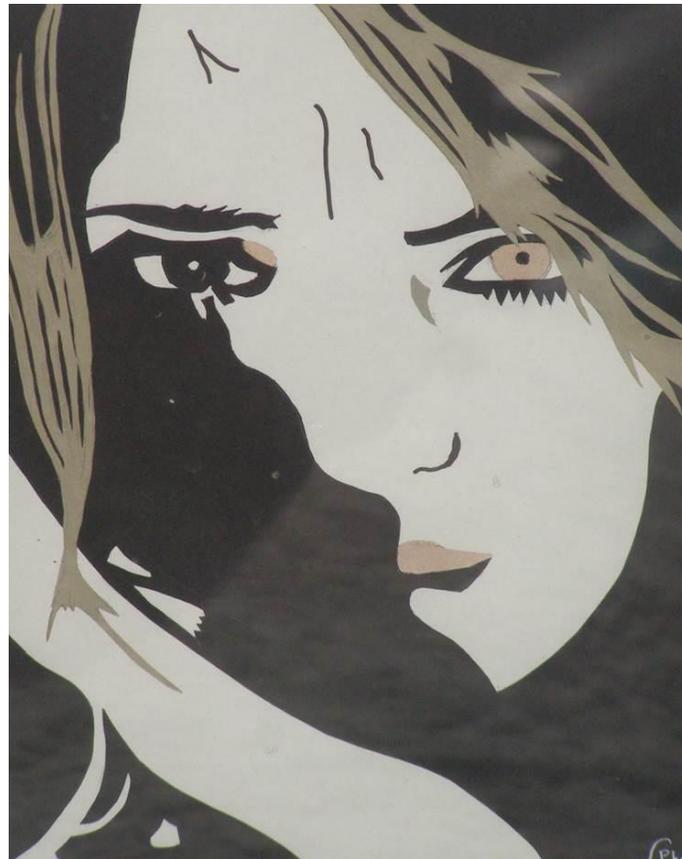
"I needed illustrations for my first book so I just went at it. I work a great deal in pen and ink, sometimes brush and ink. Sono works with brush and ink. I also work in acrylics."

Both Sono and Gustav have had solo art exhibitions.

"There is a particular literary genre that I like and it is called 'tranche de vie.' This is coming back. It was considered old-fashioned both here and in Japan. Japanese comics are tranche de vie. Tranche de vie means 'a cut of life.' It does not rely on the formula process that is often attached to novels. My book *Alexander Archipelago* is bound together by geography. It all happens with the same people and the same animals and the same trees but different stories. That is tranche de vie."

This interview has taken place beyond the room where Gustav plays piano. One enters through a series of caped, painted curtains and it brims with all the allure of literature and art, and something else – a vast sea which cannot be seen but somehow wraps all who enter here in a gentle, wise comfort.

There are stories behind every sketch, every painting and every book – too many to mention. But here is one.



"Sophie" by Phillip Charles Carlson, brush and ink.

"Her name was Sophie Graf and I knew her in Alaska. Her father's great uncle was Ivan Veniaminov. A Russian Orthodox missionary, he came to the Tlingit people here in Alaska. The Tlingit language is a very guttural language. It is still used today and it is hard to learn. Veniaminov was a genius. Within six months he learned the language and wrote out its entire grammar. He performed wonders in Alaska." (Veniaminov returned to Russia in 1841, where he was named the first Orthodox Bishop of Alaska, taking the name Innocent. Bishop Innocent continued to serve Alaska until 1859, when he was appointed Metropolitan of Moscow, the highest office in the Orthodox Church. He was canonized as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church on October 6, 1977 "Enlightener of the Aleuts, Apostle to America.")

"Sophie's father Graf was ranked in the nobility that was established by Peter the Great. He was a count. Had there been aristocracy left in Russia, she would have been a countess. She is a character in many of the books I've written. She also was, alas, a suicide in her twenties."

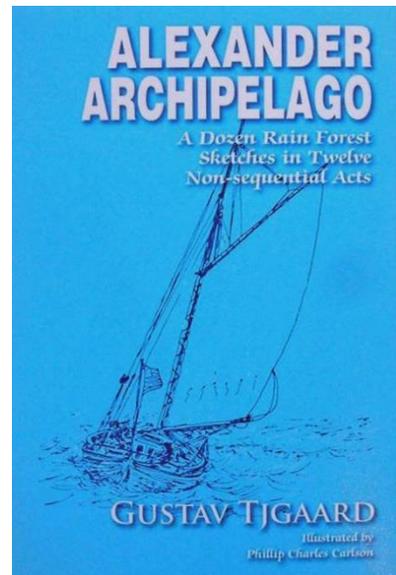
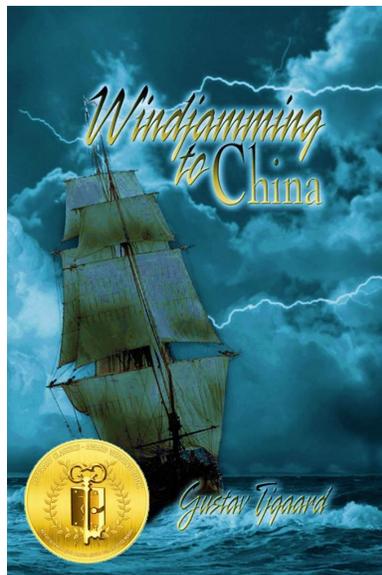
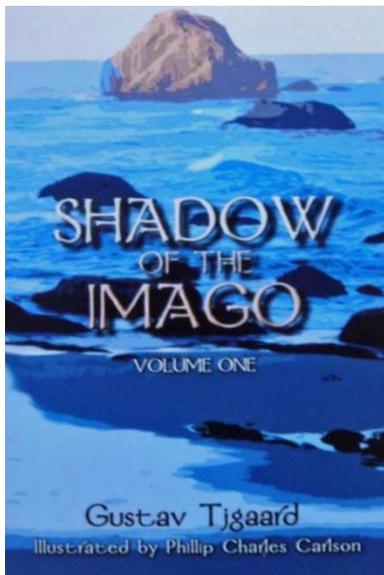


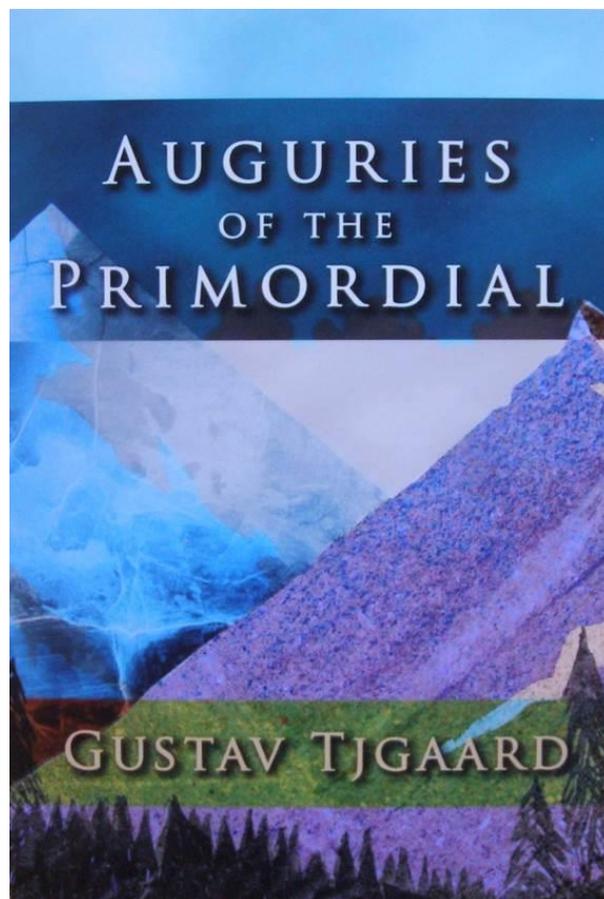
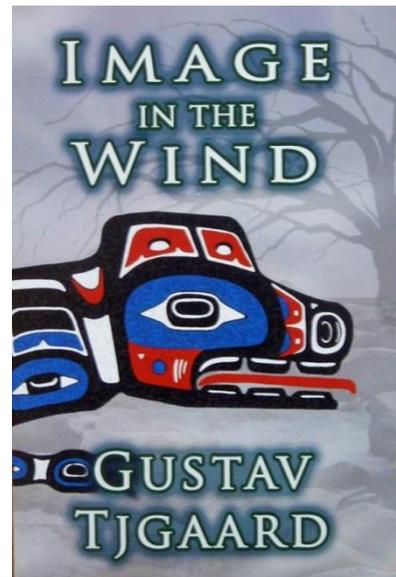
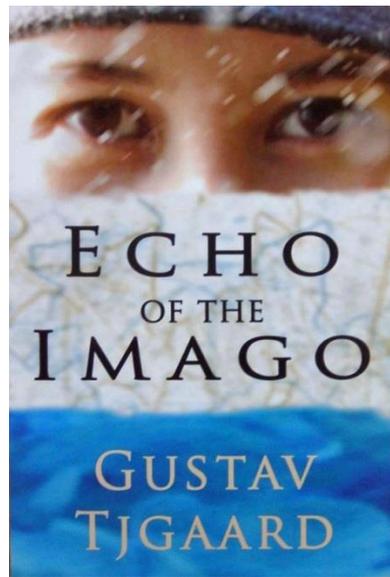
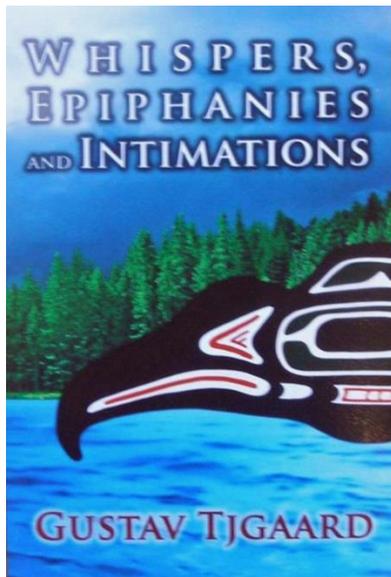
Jean Bartlett photo
Gustav Tjgaard, October 9, 2017, in the room where memories reign and tranche de vie flows.

As to the bounty of Mr. Tjgaard's extraordinary storytelling – whether by book, poem, sketch or painting – it does stop the gusts of rushing time and provides a space for actual living.

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You can find Gustav on his website and his blog, both noted with links throughout this biography, as well as on the last page. In addition he is on Amazon, Twitter and Facebook. His seven published books, in the order they were written, follow below left to right. Additionally, there are samplings of his art and several Gustav-starring photos, from here to biography end.







"Tiger" by Gustav Tjgaard/Phillip Charles Carlson.



"Bear" by Gustav Tjgaard/Phillip Charles Carlson.



"Owl" by Gustav Tjgaard/Phillip Charles Carlson.



"An old friend" by Gustav Tjgaard/Phillip Charles Carlson.



"A man and his hat" by Gustav Tjgaard/
Phillip Charles Carlson.



Gustav Tjgaard/Phillip Carlson and Sono in their Pacifica garden, summer 2017.



Jean Bartlett photo

Gustav Tjgaard/Phillip Charles Carlson with a few examples from a 2011 exhibit.