



The Islander (detail), Jamie Wyeth, 1975
Above: Peter Ralston

CHAPTER TWO



Islanders

WE HAVE EDITED AND WRITTEN FOR ISLAND PUBLICATIONS for quite a few years now, and we have learned one thing: islanders aren't particularly interested in being "described." In fact, we suspect that they're sick to death of being analyzed, studied or otherwise looked at from afar.

So a magazine that publishes stories about island people does so with a certain degree of risk. The danger isn't so much that people will take offense; an editor with reasonably sharp eyes can keep the libel, slander or otherwise unflattering characterizations out of the pages. No, the risk is more subtle: if you persist in "describing" islanders in the terms of an anthropologist — looking at them, so to speak, from afar — you have a very good chance of not being taken seriously. In this business, that's worse than being sued for libel, which can merely cost you money.

Of the nine stories included here, one exhibits more "edge" than the others. The late George Putz, after a mere 20 years on and around Vinalhaven, undertakes a thorough analysis of how islanders think. He succeeds brilliantly, becoming the exception that proves the rule.

The other stories here are less daring. Several are accounts of islanders' own experiences — island life from within; others explore island life in journalistic fashion; still others through memory. Each of these approaches is safer, perhaps, than the out-there characterizations attempted by Putz, but they're no less valid.

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