

Anne Morrow Lindbergh



G I F T

from the

S E A

50th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

With a new introduction by Reeve Lindbergh



By the Same Author

NORTH TO THE ORIENT
LISTEN! THE WIND
THE STEEP ASCENT
THE UNICORN AND OTHER POEMS
DEARLY BELOVED:
A THEME AND VARIATIONS
EARTH SHINE
BRING ME A UNICORN
HOUR OF GOLD, HOUR OF LEAD
LOCKED ROOMS AND OPEN DOORS
THE FLOWER AND THE NETTLE
WAR WITHIN AND WAR WITHOUT

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

GIFT FROM THE SEA



Introduction by Reeve Lindbergh

PANTHEON BOOKS, NEW YORK

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The quotation from Auden on [this page](#) is reprinted courtesy of Random House, Inc. The afterword, “*Gift from the Sea* Re-opened,” was written to accompany an article on *Gift from the Sea* published by *McCall’s* magazine in their August 1975 issue.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Lindbergh, Anne Morrow, 1906–2001
Gift from the Sea
1. Life. I. Title.
BD435.L52 1977 170'.202'233 76-56244
eISBN: 978-0-307-80517-1

www.pantheonbooks.com

v3.1

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Introduction to the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition

My mother published this book over fifty years ago, and I feel as if I have read it fifty times since then. I may not be exaggerating. Gift from the Sea first came out when I was ten years old, and this edition is appearing in my sixtieth year. I blush to confess that I'd never read the book at all until I was in my twenties, though this is not uncommon for the children of writers, whoever they may be. Now I read it at least once a year, sometimes twice or more.

I read Gift from the Sea at all seasons of the year and of my life. I have never once had the sense that my mother's 1955 book has lost its freshness, or that the wisdom contained within its pages has ceased to apply, whether to my own life or to what I have learned, over time, of hers.

When my mother was writing the book, she stayed in a little cottage near the beach on Captiva Island, on Florida's Gulf Coast. Many people have claimed to know which cottage it was and where it stands today, but the Florida friends who originally found the place for her told me years ago that the cottage had been gone, even then, for a long time.

Knowing this to be true, I went to spend a week on Captiva recently, bringing with me the copy of Gift from the Sea that my mother had inscribed in 1955, quite simply, "for Reeve." It was not the writer's cottage that I was looking for on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, but the writer.

Following her death and the subsequent estate processes, following several celebrations and events related to our public family history, and following a number of revelations and discussions about our personal family history, I was looking to her, again, for help. I felt that I needed her wisdom and her encouragement, one more time, to carry me forward. Just as I had hoped and expected, she did not fail me.

At whatever point one opens Gift from the Sea, to any chapter or page, the author's words offer a chance to breathe and to live more slowly. The

book makes it possible to quiet down and rest in the present, no matter what the circumstances may be. Just to read it—a little of it or in its entirety—is to exist for a while in a different and more peaceful tempo.

Even the sway and flow of language and cadence seem to me to make reference to the easy, inevitable movements of the sea. I don't know whether my mother wrote this way consciously, or whether it came as a natural result of living on the beach, day after day, while writing the book. Whatever the reason, after just a few pages I always begin to relax into that movement and to feel like something that belongs to the tide—just another piece of flotsam floating in the great oceanic rhythms of the universe. This, in itself, is deeply reassuring.

*But there is more than peace offered in this book, and more than the comforting tidal rhythms of quiet living and quiet words. Underlying all of it is an enormous, sustaining strength. It surprises me every time I meet this strength again in full force in *Gift from the Sea*. I tend to forget this quality in my mother, or maybe I've just taken it for granted.*

*I remember how small and delicate she always seemed. I remember her intelligence and her sensitivity. But when I reread *Gift from the Sea*, the illusion of fragility falls away, leaving the truth. How could I forget? She was, after all, a woman who raised five children after tragically losing her first son in 1932. She was the first woman in America to earn a first-class glider pilot's license, in 1930, and the first woman ever to win the National Geographic Society's Hubbard Medal, in 1934, for her aviation and exploration adventures. She also received the National Book Award, in 1938, for *Listen! The Wind*, her novel based on those adventures, and she remained a best-selling author all her life.*

She skied with me in Vermont when she was sixty-five and took long walks in the Swiss Alps at seventy. Five years later, at seventy-five, she hiked down into Haleakala Crater in Maui, Hawaii, to spend a night in the volcano with several of her children and her friends.

I remember looking up in darkness at the great curved bowl of the night sky, bright with stars, while my mother, standing firm in her size-five hiking boots, pointed out and identified for us the Navigator's Circle—Cappella, Castor, Pollux, Procyon, and Sirius. They were the stars by which she had first learned to set a course in the darkness as a pioneer aviator fifty years earlier.

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Above all, I think, Gift from the Sea offers its readers an unusual kind of freedom. It is hard to recognize, or even to describe, but I think this freedom is the real reason the book continues to be so well loved and so well read after all these years. I am talking about the freedom that comes from choosing to remain open, as my mother did, to life itself, whatever it may bring: joys, sorrows, triumphs, failures, suffering, comfort, and certainly, always, change.

In honest reflection upon her own experience, in trying to live from a core of inner stillness while actively responding, as we all must do, to the “here and the now,” my mother quietly set herself free, into her own life and into all life. By writing Gift from the Sea, she found a new way to live in the world, for herself and for others. It is a joy to know that with this fiftieth anniversary edition a whole new generation of readers will be able to follow her.

*Reeve Lindbergh
St. Johnsbury,
Vermont
March 2005*

I began these pages for myself, in order to think out my own particular pattern of living, my own individual balance of life, work and human relationships. And since I think best with a pencil in my hand, I started naturally to write. I had the feeling, when the thoughts first clarified on paper, that my experience was very different from other people's. (Are we all under this illusion?) My situation had, in certain ways, more freedom than that of most people, and in certain other ways, much less.

Besides, I thought, not all women are searching for a new pattern of living, or want a contemplative corner of their own. Many women are content with their lives as they are. They manage amazingly well, far better than I, it seemed to me, looking at their lives from the outside. With envy and admiration, I observed the porcelain perfection of their smoothly ticking days. Perhaps they had no problems, or had found the answers long ago. No, I decided, these discussions would have value and interest only for myself.

But as I went on writing and simultaneously talking with other women, young and old, with different lives and experiences—those who supported themselves, those who wished careers, those who were hard-working housewives and mothers, and those with more ease—I found that my point of view was not unique. In varying settings and under different forms, I discovered that many women, and men too, were grappling with essentially the same questions as I, and were hungry to discuss and argue and hammer out possible answers. Even those whose lives had appeared to be ticking imperturbably under their smiling clock-faces were often trying, like me, to evolve another rhythm with more creative pauses in it, more adjustment to their individual needs, and new and more alive relationships to themselves as well as others.

And so gradually, these chapters, fed by conversations, arguments and revelations from men and women of all groups, became more than my