

MASSACHUSETTS MARITIME ACADEMY

# ENTERPRISE

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## Sea of Opportunity

***Leadership skills and hands-on training  
steer MMA cadets on the right course***

Plus...

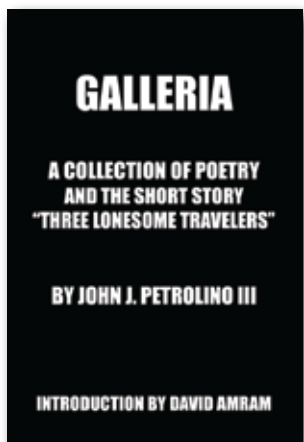
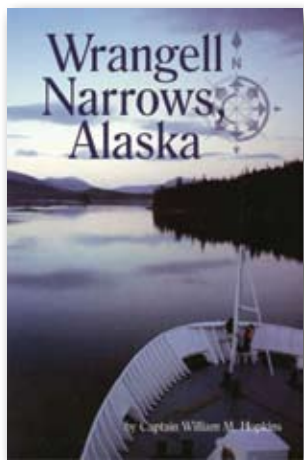
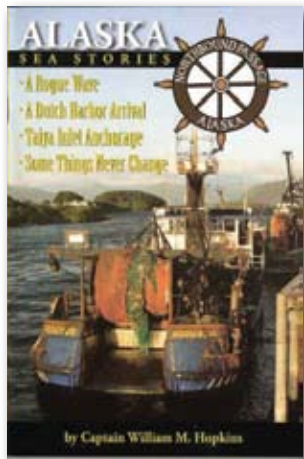
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# Off the Shelf

## Two alumni find an outlet in the written word



The ocean is inspiring. Perhaps that is why much of American literature is anchored in maritime tradition. From Herman Melville to Jack Kerouac, sea stories have served as entertainment, historical records and frameworks for dreams. Two Massachusetts Maritime Academy alumni continue in the maritime-literary tradition. Here are their personal stories.

### Alaskan Inspiration

Captain William Hopkins returned to his home state of Alaska after graduating from MMA in 1976. In 1977, he was hired by the Alaskan Marine Highway System, for which he worked for the next 29 years, retiring as master in 2006. During his long stints at sea, Hopkins was unknowingly laying the foundation for a second career of sorts.

"There is a scale of grandeur and magnitude up here that few Americans realize or understand," he says. Privileged to see extraordinary sights and experience powerful forces of nature, Hopkins wanted to share the sea-going aspect of Alaska with others. He says, "Since I cannot paint, I feel compelled to describe it with words."

To date, Hopkins has published two books centered on Alaska. The first, *Alaska Sea Stories* is a compilation of writings on the job. He says, "In all, the stories

depict real-life events. Some are accurate from start to finish, while others are a combination of events pieced together to make a good short story." Present in most of the stories is the author himself, either as a character with a fictitious name, or as a silent observer.

Hopkins' second book, *Wrangell Narrows, Alaska*, is vastly different from his book of short stories. This is a navigational manual for Wrangell Narrows in southeastern Alaska. Since the old ship masters never wrote anything down, Hopkins and his peers learned the waterway by watching, listening and reacting to verbal instructions. Over several years, Hopkins recorded their methods for the purpose of producing a guide for the next generation of Alaskan mariners.

Hopkins did not set out to become a writer when he chose a maritime career, however he appreciates the importance of good writing in a sea-going career. If a sailor remains in the maritime field long enough, he or she will rise in rank. "[As chief engineer or master] there is no end to the writing tasks you will be called



Captain William Hopkins '76 in Prince William Sound, Alaska.



upon to do at sea," Hopkins says. Whether it is a field report, a letter of commendation or instructions to the crew, officers are heavily involved with professional writing.

Hopkins, now retired from the Alaskan Marine Highway System, continues to write. He compares his process to a good cup of tea that you let steep. "I let it sit for a while and then go back to it. It is surprising what changes can occur," he says. The objective, however, is constant: improvement, accuracy and clarity in his work.

### Modern-day Beatnik

As a high school student, John Petrolino III '04 enjoyed writing assignments. They were fun, and they provided an opportunity for him to express himself. When he got to the Academy, writing took on new meaning. It started with the letters he wrote each day to his girlfriend back in New Jersey. During his freshman Sea Term, he began a journal in which he logged daily happenings aboard the ship. "Then one day, kind of out of the blue, I wrote a poem," Petrolino says.

The poem, *The Academy Blues*, is the work of a stressed youngie, but from it a true poet was born. In 2003, Petrolino attended the Lowell Celebrates Kerouac Festival, where he met author, composer, Beat legend David Amram. Since that meeting, Petrolino has joined Amram for jazz poetry readings in Lowell, Greenwich Village, at Pollard Library and at Georgian Court University. "David has



*John Petrolino III '04 at home in Red Bank, N.J.*

been a huge influence on me and my writing," Petrolino says. "By performing with him so many times, he made me aware of the lyrical sounds of poetry."

After participating in readings, attendees began asking Petrolino for copies of his work. It was then that he knew it was time to put together a book. In January 2008 *Galleria* hit Amazon.com. Petrolino says this collection of 21 poems is dedicated to the search of meaning, love, enlightenment, self-evaluation and transformation. The title poem, describes how *The Galleria* in Red Bank, N.J., has changed since his boyhood. "The poem is a big metaphor about change, and the destruction of society via progress," he says. While all of his works hold special meaning for him, this is a favorite.

Petrolino never ignores a moment of inspiration. He says that being an avid journal keeper at sea and at home helps get the garbage out, and sometimes an idea for a poem is generated. "But in general, it keeps me writing often and keeps my brain fresh for new ideas," he says. Petrolino also finds driving is one of his most creative times. "I

have a digital memo recorder in the car, and I dictate a rough draft of a poem when an idea strikes me."

Serving as second assistant engineer with Oceaneering, it's not surprising that much of Petrolino's writing is done at sea. Since he never knows when an idea will come, he always keeps a small notebook with him. "I could be in the middle of doing engine maintenance and get an idea. I wipe off my hands, pull out my notebook and write," he says, adding, "Some of the best pieces have come to me when I was very busy."

Hopkins and Petrolino highly recommend that mariners keep personal journals of their travels and events at sea. "Yours will be a collection of experiences unlike anything most people ashore will ever go through," Hopkins says. "You will enjoy your journal years later, and so will your family." ★

*These are just two of several alumni who have published their work. We applaud all MMA alumni-authors for their accomplishments. You can find both Hopkins' and Petrolino's work at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).*

# ALUMNI HIGH FIVE