



How did living on Cape Cod shape your story?

You can't live on Cape Cod without being aware of the *Whydah*. More years ago than I care to admit, during my college years, I directed a children's camp in Wellfleet, and I knew the story back then. There's no way that one can walk along the shore of Eastham or Wellfleet and look out to sea and not say, *Is that wreck out there? Am I going to step on coins?*

But on the Cape, everyone is consumed with the story of how Barry Clifford found the wreck, and with the treasure hunt. To me, that's not the great story. To me, the *neglected* story is the great story: the story of the *Whydah* before it went down. In a single year, Sam Bellamy, who was never a pirate before, became the most successful pirate of all time. How he did that is an amazing story.

What discoveries that you made during your research surprised you the most?

The fact that pirate ships were the greatest democracies the world had ever known until that time. The reason most of these guys became pirates was that they could not stand authority, and so they established a system where you had to vote on everything. You wouldn't attack a ship until you took a vote on whether you should do it or not. If you wanted the captain out, you voted him out, and that happened to some of the worst, most notorious pirates in the world. It happened to the pirate Bellamy apprenticed under, Ben Hornigold, because he wouldn't attack English ships.

Were pirates brutal people? You bet. Were they hoodlums? You bet. But under the Articles of Agreement that you signed when you joined a pirate ship, you had the first workman's compensation in the world: if you lost an arm, you got so much; if you lost a leg, you got so much more. And the equality was extraordinary. They all slept in hammocks, but if there weren't enough hammocks to go around, even the captains and the officers slept on the deck. The captain's quarters were open to everybody.

There was also racial equality aboard a pirate ship that didn't exist on land. There were a large number of people of color, and Native American sailors, including ex-slaves, and they received equal shares, rights, responsibilities, and privileges. Where else are you going to find that in 1717?

The other thing that's amazing to me is how effectively Bellamy used mariners' fear of pirates. He captured something like eighty ships in a year, and I don't know if he ever fired ten shots. All it took was his ship's coming into sight flying the Jolly Roger, its orchestra playing the most raucous, loud, horrendous music and its pirates with cutlasses in their teeth, getting ready to board.

How were you able to describe marine archaeology so vividly?

I did as much research on that as I did on the rest of the book. Actually, this didn't start out to be a book on the *Whydah*; it started out about the whole idea of marine archaeology. I read about the discovery of a ship off the coast of Turkey and how it became the first ship ever excavated archaeologically while still underwater, and I've been fascinated by marine archaeology ever since.

With so many books under your belt, what inspires you to keep writing?

The reason I've been able to write eighty-five books, and the reason I write three books a year sometimes, is the diversity of subjects. I am the luckiest guy in the world. My offices are upstairs in my house, and I bounce up those stairs every morning. I can't think of anything better than to start with a blank piece of paper and tell a story. It's all about telling a story and making it come alive. I used to have a card that said this, but now it's ingrained in me, so I don't need the card anymore. It said you couldn't make it up. You couldn't make up a story about the *Whydah*. The truth is too interesting.