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From the EDITOR



Earth Day on April 22 brought snow flurries and bracing winds to UConn's Avery Point campus, hardly ideal conditions for an outdoor puppet show.

Yet young and old came, swaddled in winter coats, knit caps and blankets. Weary of screen life, they settled on the cold ground for an experience that all but disappeared during the pandemic—live performance. Felicia Cooper, a UConn Master of Arts student in puppetry, would be staging her original show, “Ish,” a more hopeful retelling of the “Moby-Dick” tale with an 11-year-old girl as protagonist. Recipient of one of CT Sea Grant’s 2020 arts support awards, Cooper’s show at Avery Point was one of several she’s offered to outdoor audiences around the state, from Mansfield to Hartford. As she lines up more venues for the summer, Cooper is working on rigging up her bicycle with a cart to transport herself and her set gear in the most environmentally friendly fashion.

At Avery Point on Earth Day, the tale that unfolded through shadow puppets, original recorded music by Juliana Carr and Cooper’s animated one-woman performance did not disappoint. All ages connected with its messages about dealing with fear and isolation, then finding courage to face big challenges — even ones as big as global plastic pollution.

“It took lots of adaptation in the pandemic,” she said a few days after the performance. Originally conceived as a six-person show on a large stage, “Ish” had to be simplified. It became mobile, and more accessible. “It ended up we were doing more, smaller shows,” she said. “It opened more doors.”

Towards the end, the main character, Ish, sums up what she’s learned by facing hard problems, and finding a way forward.

“We don’t have to be the smartest,” she tells the audience. “We just have to be smart-ish—our version of smart. We don’t have to be the bravest. We just have to be brave-ish—just brave enough to take the next step.”

Both the story of “Ish,” and the story behind the story couldn’t be a more fitting parable for this issue of *Wrack Lines*. Readers will find the same plucky spirit of that 11-year-old girl in the oystermen and other seafood purveyors, researchers, coastal communities and environmental science experts profiled in the articles as they respond to different kinds of crises.

Sellers of fished and farmed seafood in Connecticut created new ways to get their products to customers during the pandemic. Their counterparts in Southeast Asia clearly need additional support, but did their best to adapt, too. Robert Klee, former state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Commissioner and now a Yale University lecturer, mined the lessons of the past year that show the benefits of living more sustainably.

Another article recounts how researchers including CT Sea Grant Director Sylvain De Guise focused on figuring out the long-term effects of the largest oil spill in U.S. waters on bottlenose dolphins. They reached troubling conclusions that call attention to the continued perils of fossil fuel dependence on the planet. Coastal communities in North Carolina and Connecticut are facing another side effect of the oil-and-gas economy: the rising seas caused by climate change. Some are turning to managed retreat or buyouts as the best solutions to get people and homes out of the way of floodwaters. Waiting for 100% certainty isn’t an option. Just like Ish discovers, sometimes the only way is to go outside and meet the whale.

For information about “Ish,” visit: <https://www.feliciatmcooper.com/ish>



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Above photo: Felicia Cooper, right, sees the silhouette of a passing whale as she’s traveling through the ocean in her submarine during her original puppet show, “Ish.” Photo: Judy Benson

Cover photo: Nicole Dawson, sales and delivery clerk at J & R Scallops, leaves a refrigerated bag of scallops, crab cakes, salmon and cod fillets to a customer’s home on April 22. Photo: Judy Benson