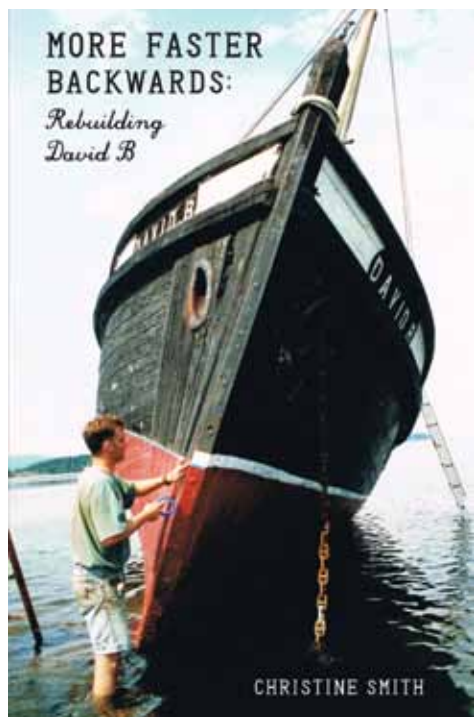


Northwest Author Spotlight

By Joanna Nesbitt



Christine Smith

When Jeffrey and Christine Smith first met—as twenty-somethings in the '90s—Jeffrey had just moved to Bellingham from the East Coast with a dream of owning an expedition passenger boat for adventure tours, similar to those he'd worked on in Maine. Christine, a recent Western Washington University anthropology graduate, was at loose ends with career choices. She hoped to own a bed and breakfast in the San Juan Islands someday, preferably a Victorian with a garden and cats. As Jeffrey listened to Christine talk about her B&B idea on the night they met, he asked her if it had to have a foundation.

Fourteen years later, the Smiths run successful weekend and extended boat tours in the San Juan Islands and Inside Passage on the sturdy *David B*, a wooden boat they purchased in 1998 and rebuilt as a passenger vessel for six. But restoring the boat and launching their business, Northwest Navigation, was no easy journey, and what they thought would be a two-year project

evolved into an eight-year epic.

From the beginning, Christine, who once worked in a photography studio, took photographs to document the uncertain odyssey and later created photo albums that would become a template for telling *David B's* story to the Smiths' passengers. In 2011, at the urging of two loyal passengers, Christine turned the tale into a book, chronicling the journey's risks and challenges in *More Faster Backwards: Rebuilding the David B*. Told in flashbacks, the book swings between the *David B's* 2006 maiden voyage and the years of hard work leading up to it, equal parts adventure tale and resounding thank you to the friends and family who helped.

The first time they saw the *David B*, neglected and languishing in a cove on Lopez Island, Christine wasn't sure what she was looking at. Was the hulk a complete mistake or could it be brought back with paint and varnish? Built in 1929, the 65-foot workboat, designed to tow fishing boats to salm-

on fishing grounds, had seen better days. But Christine knew Jeffrey was excited from the way he asked rapid-fire questions about the engine, an original Washington Iron Works engine manufactured in Seattle, one of just 17 left in the world. "It's a pretty special engine," Jeffrey explains, "and I think it's the last running 3-cylinder engine left."

Sold on her potential, the young couple bought the *David B*, embarking on their "two-year" project. For the first eight months, they traveled from Bellingham to Lopez, borrowing the tools and shop of the *David B's* former owner. With the help of family and friends, they replaced the rotten foredeck first so they could remount the windlass (used to pull up the anchor) to sail home to Bellingham. There, they berthed the boat in Bellingham's Squalicum Harbor, not far from their recently purchased house.

But managing their day jobs—Jeffrey as a captain for Victoria San Juan Cruises, Christine as a gardener—and



fitting the *David B* into their little spare time proved tricky. They never seemed to have enough time or money and the two-year projection turned into three, four, six. They maxed out credit cards, spent family contributions and refinanced their house multiple times.

Despite the loans, Christine says money was always the most stressful aspect of the journey. In 2004, another challenge arose: the Port of Bellingham issued a requirement that all moored boats carry insurance and the Smiths knew they were at a turning point.

Should they continue the project? Carrying insurance required a survey that involved more money. They decided to let the survey results dictate whether to continue or quit—even though they'd sunk \$50,000 into their dream and untold hours of labor.

Luckily, the surveyor was not only hopeful, he gave them a to-do list, and with that list they recommitted to the project, in the end rebuilding from bow to stern. In June 2006, eight years after her rescue, *David B* embarked on her first sail to Alaska as a passenger vessel.

What may charm and capture

audiences most is the love story that underlies that fortitude—two young dreamers and their boat against the elements. 🚤

For more information:

Rebuilding the *David B*
www.morefasterbackwards.com

About Jeffrey and Christine
and their passenger tours
www.northwestnavigation.com