



Light Years: Memoir of a Modern Lighthouse Keeper

Caroline Woodward

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From publisher's website:

In 2007, Caroline Woodward was itching for a change. With an established career in book-selling and promotion, four books of her own and having raised a son with her husband, Jeff, she yearned for adventure and to re-ignite her passion for writing. Jeff was tired of piecing together low-paying part-time jobs and, with Caroline's encouragement, applied for a position as a relief lightkeeper on a remote North Pacific island. They endured lonely months of living apart, but the way of life rejuvenated Jeff and inspired Caroline to contemplate serious shifts in order to accompany him. When a permanent position for a lighthouse keeper became available, Caroline quit her job and joined Jeff on the lights.

Caroline soon learned that the lighthouse-keeping life does not consist of long, empty hours in which to write. The reality is hard physical labour, long stretches of isolation and the constant threat of de-staffing. Beginning with a 3:30 a.m. weather report, the days are filled with maintaining the light station buildings, sea sampling, radio communication, beach cleanup, wildlife encounters and everything in between. As for dangerous rescue missions or dramatic shipwrecks—that kind of excitement is rare. “So far the only life I know I've saved is my own,” she says, with her trademark dry wit. Yet Caroline is exhilarated by the scenic coastline with its drizzle and fog, seabirds and whales, and finds time to grow a garden and, as anticipated, write.

Told with eloquent introspection and an eye for detail, *Light Years* is the personal account of a lighthouse keeper in twenty-first century British Columbia—an account that details Caroline's endurance of extreme climatic, interpersonal and medical challenges, as well as the practical and psychological aspects of living a happy, healthy, useful and creative life in isolation.

Light Years: Memoir of a Modern Lighthouse Keeper Details

Date : Published September 5th 2015 by Harbour Publishing

ISBN : 9781550177275

Author : Caroline Woodward

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography Memoir, Cultural, Canada

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From Reader Review *Light Years: Memoir of a Modern Lighthouse Keeper* for online ebook

Shonna Froebel says

<http://cdnbookworm.blogspot.ca/2016/0...>

juddy18 says

This book was a perfect story to read in December. Why do we decide to try a totally new life? When do we find time for writing? What is the value of our work? These are the sorts of questions Caroline Woodward engages with throughout her fascinating text about deciding to become a lighthouse keeper with her husband. It's a quiet book, appropriate in tone I think for the long days of silence on the island, but one that I truly appreciated.

Alli says

I received a copy of this book through Goodreads giveaways for an honest review.

I'm not entirely sure what I expected but this wasn't exactly it. I have always had a fascination with lighthouses and the people who work in them so I was very excited to read this. However, it seemed to me that the author spent more time focusing on her writing and the struggles she went through while she and her husband were apart due to the keeper job. Now this is not a bad thing because it is well written and rather interesting but it was not what I expected. Still I enjoyed it though at times it was difficult to ascertain where in time we were, the past or the present, which I did find hard to follow.

Linda says

Loved this book. Now going to have to read up on all things lighthouse related.

Joanne says

Interesting meditation on the author's life. This book is not a straightforward accounting of a lightkeeper's life, it is more of an inner look at the author's desire to write and her path towards the lighthouse. I enjoyed the description of the ocean, the lighthouse stations, the many jobs involved in keeping a station going. Her recounting of history and the natural world along the coast was very interesting.

Karen says

After a brief stay years ago at Porlier Pass lighthouse with lighthouse keepers Lorne and Dorothy Gibson (who had become friends with my boater parents while stationed at the Lamb Island lighthouse in Lake Superior), I've had an interest in life caring for the lights. So I was delighted to read Caroline Woodward's memoir of a modern lighthouse keeper.

Not only does she immerse the reader in the day-by-day, season-by-season role and responsibilities of lighthouse keepers, she also invites you along on her author journey, discovering both the challenges and the life-giving nature of being a writer. It was her poignant reflections on the beauty of the wild Pacific coast and the writing life that I found most resonated with me:

P. 99

The sky and the sea are so dynamic and ever-evolving, in a state of constant flux.

P. 197

Here there is time to think, to marvel, to let go of grudges and regrets, to solve real and imaginary problems, to write day after day, to be content with what I have, where I am and who I am.

P. 181

But I won't retire from writing until I pop my clogs. Fall off my twig. Keel over in my gumboots. Some day my ship will come in. As Jack Kerouac said, "Genius gives birth, talent delivers." I tell myself that good writers, like good guitar players, are a dime a dozen and that only those of us who work really, really hard and who stretch our repertoire and work well with others will deliver.

P. 187

I can only put my best efforts into being an extrovert for so long. I will eventually burn out unless I can get to a quiet place to think and create, to write and inhabit my own worlds.

P.194

Life is not a foot race. It's more like a grand obstacle course with stops for picnics along the way.

When I took a break before reading the last chapter, I was wishing for some rescue stories and was disappointed there had been no mention of sea otters ... And then came chapter 17, Beyond These Blue Horizons, where Caroline explains the key support role of lighthouse keepers to the Search and Rescue crews and Coast Guard staff who handle the majority of rescues. But then she does talk about times when lighthouse keepers made all the difference for shipwrecked pleasure boaters and fishing boats in trouble. Finally there was a line about my favourite marine mammal: "the sea otter clapping prickly-shelled sea urchins to his chest."

And then, to round out the collection of stunning photographs taken by her lighthouse-keeper husband Jeff George, there was a beautiful surf shot of a sea otter doing what sea otters do. Thanks for a most satisfying end to a most interesting memoir.

Laura Lander says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, a peek into the practical reality and the creative thoughts and personality of Caroline Woodward, via writings gleaned from her journal as a lighthouse keeper. As an author of books gleaned from my own journals, I see great value in sharing our introspections and experiences, and I deeply respect those who are willing and courageous enough to do so! Thank you, Caroline, you inspire.

Jacqueline Boss says

This is a gorgeously written and thoughtful book and I wish it were many hundreds of pages longer so that I could keep enjoying it. Caroline Woodward is a mature, interesting, humble, well-traveled writer who makes the life-changing decision with her husband to live on the wild and remote islands of BC. Each chapter is a new window into her life and the lives of lightkeepers and their struggles and pleasures. Woodward is intelligent and often very funny in the way she presents things- in these pages are romantic tales of storms and whales and birds, idyllic accounts of gingerbread-baking marathons and garden-tending, and laugh-out-loud one-liners. My new favorite non-fiction.

At the start I had decided to give this book to my mom as a Christmas gift, but I don't know if I can part with it. It was so good that it feels like a teddy bear in book form.

For good measure, a lighthouse illustration of mine:

A few passages:

I slept and slept on Egg Island, with only the sounds of the wind in the evergreens, the cries of the sea birds and the comforting push and pull of the ocean swells. One night humpback whales circled the island, singing their eerie whale songs, some *basso profundo*, others swooping up into the heldentenor range. I had to pinch myself.

Imagine falling asleep to whales singing deep sea lullabies.

I had to find a way to live this life.

(p 39)

So long to the ditzy amateur fortune-teller in Canada who declared me "too scattered" due to the number of vowels and the configuration of consonants in my good name, which true to my fifteen-year-old self has remained unchanged. Thank you to the quiet Hindu numerologist in Jaffna who sighed and said I would be a seeker of knowledge all my life. Farewell to the famous psychic who said I would only write four books and that I was so good at working with young people that I should so that instead. Well, Madame, you died before my fifth book came out.

(p 85)

Compared to lightkeepers in the century before us, who had groceries delivered by boat two or three times a year and who depended heavily on their gardens, the sea and hardy livestock to survive, we are mighty

fortunate. When I think of those lightkeepers and their families, who waited for weeks and months for the grocery ship, who then slaughtered the last chicken and ran down the last scrawny goat, who mixed cornstarch and water to feed their children and other true horror stories of near-starvation on the lights, I count my blessings and do my utmost not to waste a scrap of food.

(p 145)

When the Coast Guard ships come in to refuel us or bring in a crew to inspect and maintain the winch and high line, I always offer fresh coffee and tea, plus cookies, muffins or cake. When it's an all-day job, like the quadrennial anniversary to inspect and/ or refurbish every line and cable and bolt, I usually bring out a big cake on a covered glass pedestal, little plates and dessert forks, and a choice of cloth or paper napkins. Pottery and china mugs, honey, cane sugar, real spoons. Cream if we have it, virtuous, boring 2% if we don't. As I told a happy crew member digging in to the triple-decker carrot cake one year, it is very important to celebrate the finer things in life whenever we get the chance.

(p 148)

The only thing that could have been improved was likely out of the author's control- the cover is terrible. And with so many good photos included in the books pages, it's odd that the dust jacket is so tacky. This is not a book to judge by its cover!

Gloria says

As I read this book I felt I was becoming a friend of Caroline Woodward. She grew up in the Peace River country of British Columbia on a homestead, and everything she learned there about self-reliance, taking calculated risks, self-confidence, empathy and neighbourliness have infused her whole adult life. She always knew she would be a writer, and her drive to experience life and to write about it are front and centre in this memoir. Refreshing to read is the thankfulness she has for her life with her soulmate Jeff. I live on Vancouver Island and can picture all the places she talks about. I feel the sense of awe she has for the ocean and all its facets and seasons. The life of lightkeepers she describes leaves me exhausted with its demands. I knew their responsibilities for keeping the lights functioning would entail all weather dedication, but I never thought about all the cleaning, repairing, scientific measurement taking, maintenance work, gardening, and general planning that kind of existence requires. I experienced all the flurry of activity when the supply helicopter came, and the joy of her flowering literary life, and the satisfaction of jobs finished and well done. Woodward's love of her life shines through her very readable prose.

Tina says

A beautiful story about the real life story of a current lighthouse keeper. I loved this book.
