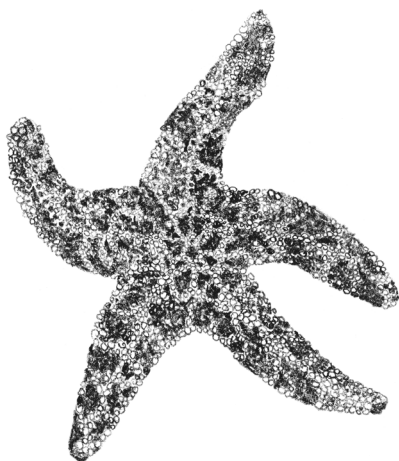


# BEYOND THE OUTER SHORES



THE UNTOLD ODYSSEY OF **ED RICKETTS**,  
THE PIONEERING ECOLOGIST WHO INSPIRED  
JOHN STEINBECK AND JOSEPH CAMPBELL

**ERIC ENNO TAMM**



RAINCOAST BOOKS

*Vancouver*

*For Dan Edwards,  
who knows why or should*

*And for my brother Victor,  
who helped me realize my dream*

# CONTENTS

	<i>Note on Specimen Drawings</i> : ix
	<i>Prologue</i> : xi
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<i>Of Myths and Men</i> : 1
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<i>The Trilogy</i> : 25
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<i>Terra Incognita</i> : 55
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<i>Clayoquot, Stubbs Island</i> : 71
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<i>The Great Tide Pool</i> : 83
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<i>Breaking Through</i> : 103
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	<i>Stories to Tell</i> : 123
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	<i>The Lab</i> : 139
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	<i>The Jesus Walk</i> : 157
<b>CHAPTER 10</b>	<i>A Hero's Journey</i> : 177
<b>CHAPTER 11</b>	<i>Galapagos of the North</i> : 199
<b>CHAPTER 12</b>	<i>Farewell Party</i> : 223
<b>CHAPTER 13</b>	<i>In Toto</i> : 235
<b>CHAPTER 14</b>	<i>Death or Departure</i> : 261
<b>CHAPTER 15</b>	<i>Laying the Ghost</i> : 277
	<i>Epilogue</i> : 307
	<i>Notes</i> : 317
	<i>Selected Bibliography</i> : 345
	<i>Acknowledgments</i> : 351
	<i>Index</i> : 357

## PROLOGUE

*On behalf of the Cannery Row Company, it gives me great pleasure to welcome visitors from all over the world to our Cannery Row community of merchants and businesses. We all hope you have a memorable and enjoyable visit!*

—TED J. BALESTRERI, MANAGING GENERAL PARTNER,  
*Official Cannery Row Visitors Guide*

**C**ANNERY Row in Monterey in California is a cliché, a light breeze, a clanking cash register, a sugary delight, an impulse buy, a novel, a trinket, a movie, a retailer’s dream. Cannery Row is the tacky and tailored, tinsel and polish and Hollywood, cheap sentiment and parking lots and junk food, souvenir galleries of a literary icon, tank tops, restaurants and discount warehouses and little crowded gift shops. Its inhabitants are, as the tourist brochure says, “shoppers, newlyweds, tourists and sunbathers on beaches,” by which it means Everybody.

That, with sincere apologies to John Steinbeck, is the Cannery Row of today, more than half a century since he wrote his famous novel by the same name about the “whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches” who inhabited the stink of California’s sardine industry.

Much has changed since then. John Steinbeck is dead, and so too, one could argue, is Cannery Row. In 1957, when it was suggested that the

Row be turned into a tourist attraction, Steinbeck said it should be torn down. “Man’s greed killed off the fish. Now they’ve got to ‘kill off’ some tourists to make up for it,” he said. To Steinbeck, tearing down the old canneries and returning Monterey Bay to its pristine state would have been a fitting and definitive end of an era—the burial of the industrial monsters that had devoured the ocean’s bounty and regurgitated it in small tin cans. Cannery Row had killed off the fish and, thus, it too must die.

Cannery Row has lived on though, but in name only. The “Wops and Chinamen and Polaks, men and women in trousers and rubber coats and oilcloth aprons” who breathed life into its environs, and into Steinbeck’s novel, are just a memory now. The shells of the old canneries have been converted into pastel-painted malls for jewelers, fashion outlets, art galleries and ubiquitous boutiques. It’s a theme park of literary kitsch. And it was all done in the name of celebrating California’s greatest writer.

John Steinbeck wrote some thirty books and screenplays that were adapted into as many films and TV series and received twenty-nine Academy Award nominations (including two for Steinbeck himself) and a Pulitzer Prize—and which eventually won the author the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. There’s a John Steinbeck Society, a Steinbeck Newsletter and Quarterly journal, Steinbeck research centers at two universities and an International Steinbeck Congress—not to mention the doorstep-size biographies and Ph.D. dissertations all dissecting the man and his work. His books continue to sell hundreds of thousands of copies every year, and *East of Eden* even relaunched Oprah’s Book Club in 2003. Salinas, Steinbeck’s hometown, opened a multimillion-dollar National Steinbeck Center in 1998, dedicated to the man that most citizens of Salinas had actually hated. But the greatest monument to Steinbeck is in Monterey, where a small stretch of Ocean View Avenue called Cannery Row has been converted into a tourist shrine to the novelist and his fictional characters.

\* \* \*

**ONE** day in May 1999, on my first trip to Monterey, I had a hard time separating the real from the fictional on Cannery Row. There was a Lee Chong market—as in *Cannery Row*—but the owner obviously wasn’t named Lee Chong. The store has been renovated into a gift shop, Alicia’s Antiques, with a Steinbeck Remembrance Room full of original manuscripts, first editions and memorabilia. Monterey had a legendary madam, too—her name is Dora Flood in the novel. On the site of her former brothel is Mackerel Jack’s Trading Co., which seduced me with specials on decorative plates, plastic starfish and painted seashells. I also saw a delivery truck with a “Grapes of Wrath—California Style Catering” logo parked along a side street, although it probably wasn’t serving the poor Mexican farm laborers I saw working the dusty fields outside Salinas. And nowadays the heart of Cannery Row is the Steinbeck Plaza, a slick tourist trap, complete with a bronze bust of the Row’s great man peering into a sea of shuffling shoppers.

That the central theme of Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row* is actually a rejection of this type of mindless materialism, and instead a celebration of the spiritual and the marginal in society, must be one of the most ironic, if not tragic, footnotes in American literary history.

Few today seem aware of the ideas or individual who inspired Steinbeck’s novel half a century ago. Steinbeck, for instance, was never the heart of Cannery Row. Even he would have agreed that that person was Ed Ricketts, his best friend, whose old home-office today stands empty and relatively untouched, one of the only buildings on the Row not colonized by kitschy commerce.

More than any place, this two-story building with its sun-blackened, unfinished wood paneling was the spiritual and intellectual heart of Cannery Row. I had traveled thousands of miles from a remote village on Canada’s Pacific Coast to pay homage to this place and its legendary proprietor, Ed Ricketts. He was a scientist, a marine biologist to be precise, and more importantly an ecologist at a time when the fledgling field of ecology was nothing more than the esoterica of pedantic scientists tucked away in academia’s hallowed halls.

I first stumbled upon Ed Ricketts and a book he had written in my eleventh grade biology class. Alton Crane, our dedicated and well-humored teacher, required that we conduct a much dreaded, much maligned (at least by us students) collecting survey of a local beach in Ucluelet (pronounced *you-CLUE-let*), my hometown and a tiny fishing village located midway up the rugged outer coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia. The project was called the “Big Beach Transect.” Students were supposed to map a cross-section of the craggy beach and its tidal zones. We collected and identified all the marine species there, and then literally drew all of this on a thirty-foot roll of paper illustrating the web of life on the seashore. Although I didn’t know it at the time, Ed Ricketts had traveled to Ucluelet and conducted an almost identical survey a half-century before.

I remember his seashore book distinctly. With old black-and-white photos and drawings, *Between Pacific Tides* was no longer the best zoological book for identifying the many different species of crabs, tide pool fish, sea anemones and sea cradles that I collected. There were far better books with spectacularly vivid color photographs for that. But his was thick with information on a species’ habitat, food, breeding habits and relationships. It was the only book in our school library that was specifically dedicated to the ecology of the seashore. When it was first published, I have come to learn, it was the only such book in the entire world.

Every year for more than half a century, hundreds of thousands of people around the world read Ricketts’ pioneering ecological thinking. They don’t actually read his writing per se, although he did coauthor two splendid seashore books, *Between Pacific Tides* and *Sea of Cortez*, which are both relatively well read considering they are scientific tomes. Rather, they hear his voice echo in the novels of John Steinbeck, who fictionalized his best friend in half a dozen novels.

Few people know the true story of Ed Ricketts, whose life-voyage of scientific discovery has been inadvertently obscured and overshadowed by Steinbeck and his mythmaking. Even fewer understand the role Ricketts played in inspiring Steinbeck to underpin his writing with the science of ecology—a fact that is overlooked or grossly understated by many literary critics and scholars even today. And hardly a soul has any

idea about Ricketts' enormous influence on Joseph Campbell, the twentieth century's great mythologist.

Ed Ricketts was a lone, largely marginalized scientist—an outcast to academia with no university degrees, no memberships, no honors. His pioneering ideas were at first dismissed by the scientific establishment. He was principally supported—morally, financially and scientifically—in his research endeavors by a ragtag group of bohemian friends, family and, to borrow Steinbeck's words, “no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, [and] bums.”

Despite his meager means and at times threadbare poverty, Ed Ricketts tried to accomplish what had eluded entire armies of academics, well-funded museums, prestigious university marine stations and international expeditions. He did it not for academic honors (he received none), nor for fame or fortune (he disliked the former and received not the latter). He had a deeply personal thirst for knowledge and discovery, believing he could help humanity take an enlightened leap, as he saw it, into the future.

Yet it is his legend of beer drinking, sexual indulgence and propensity for misadventure, as lionized and fictionalized by John Steinbeck, and not his scientific legacy, that looms larger than life today.

\* \* \*

**AT** the time of his sudden death, Ed Ricketts was completing, with the help of John Steinbeck, the most ambitious coastal scientific investigation ever attempted. Its geographic scope and zoological breadth were simply unprecedented, and more significantly, the ecological approach employed was visionary, ahead of its time by decades.

Over the past several years, I have ventured humbly in the wake of Ed Ricketts from the Sea of Cortez to Sitka, Alaska—a journey that has ultimately and delightfully led me back to the seashore of my childhood in Ucluelet. What follows, then, is an untold odyssey of sorts. It is pieced together from Ricketts' unpublished research papers, philosophical essays, notebooks, diaries, financial and corporate records, personal correspondence, interviews with family and friends, newspaper clippings, steamship logs and of course the writings of John Steinbeck.

Ed Ricketts was a hero in the Homeric, not Hollywood, tradition. Decades before anyone else, he took up the call of ecology on the seashore and set off on a night-sea journey to an unknown land where he searched the tide pools by day and the stars at night for a boon, a scientific discovery, with which he could redeem a world that seemed, at least to him a half-century ago, to be racing recklessly toward ecological oblivion.

Although this odyssey ends in unspeakable tragedy, the lessons learned as we travel alongside Ed Ricketts are life affirming nonetheless.