

When the Setting Becomes a Character and St. Patrick's Rune a Thread: Tracing Jane Resh Thomas's writing of *Courage at Indian Deep* through papers she has donated to the Kerlan Collection - CLRC

Courage at Indian Deep by Jane Resh Thomas is a survival story featuring Cass who was unwillingly transplanted to Lake Superior's North Shore after his father lost his job and his parents agreed to run his grandparent's resort. The move is made more difficult for Cass by the bullying he endures at the fists of Ansel Peterson and his classmates. While he "[loves] the changing beauty of this freshwater sea, with its unobstructed horizon" (p. 12) he longs for the home and pals he's left in Minneapolis.

Mun Benson, an old sailor, offers friendship, instructions in knot typing, and stories. It's through Benson's tales that Cass learns the lessons the "Big Lake" teaches those willing to listen and learn:

Never trust the weather on Superior. Treacherous as a wildcat. Look away, blink your eyes, and she pounces. Many's the ship that's smashed to smithereens on those rocks...You fall out of your boat in the spring, you don't last ten minutes. We have a saying: Superior never gives up her dead. You sink to the bottom in this cold water... (pp. 21-22)

Although Lake Superior may initially begin as the setting, it is the lake as a living being that lures readers in.

Lake Superior is the largest freshwater lake in the world with a surface area of 31,700 square miles. It has always supported trade in furs, fish, lumber, and minerals, but it may be more famous for its rocky shorelines, scenic beauty, fierce winter storms, and the over 550 shipwrecks to be found at its depths. The Ojibwe who settled on its shores called it Ojibwe Gichigami. It also appears in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha" and Gordon Lightfoot's "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*."

The words of St. Patrick's Rune, the names of ships, dates of storms, and shipwrecks are woven into the novel. As I read I wondered how Thomas handled writing a book whose setting becomes a character and why she incorporated St. Patrick's Rune. I searched the papers Thomas donated to the Kerlan Collection-CLRC for the answers to those and other questions.