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Following *The Highest Tide, Border Songs, and Truth Like the Sun*, Jim Lynch now gives us a grand and idiosyncratic family saga that will stand alongside Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

Joshua Johannsen has spent all of his life surrounded by sailboats. His grandfather designed them, his father built and raced them, his Einstein-obsessed mother knows why and how they work (or not). For Josh and his two siblings, their backyard was the Puget Sound and sailing their DNA. But both his sister and brother fled many years ago: Ruby to Africa and elsewhere to do good works on land, and Bernard to god-knows-where at sea, a fugitive and pirate. Suddenly thirty-one, Josh—who repairs boats of all kinds in a Steinbeckian marina south of Seattle—is pained and confused by whatever the hell went wrong with his volatile family. His parents are barely speaking, his mystified grandfather is drinking harder, and he himself—despite an endless and comic flurry of online dates—hasn't even come close to finding a girlfriend.

But when the Johannssens unexpectedly reunite for the most important race in these waters—all of them together on a classic vessel they made decades ago—they will be carried to destinies both individual and collective, and to a heart-shattering revelation. Past and present merge seamlessly and collide surprisingly as Jim Lynch reveals a family unlike any other, with the grace and humor and magic of a master storyteller.

Before the Wind Details

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From Reader Review Before the Wind for online ebook

Blaine DeSantis says

Such mixed feelings about this book. For me, it did not live up to Lynch's past efforts and that was a major disappointment. Not sure if it was his writing style or rather that this book really appears to be written to boating/sailing aficionados instead of the general readership. I got totally lost with all the boating phraseology and to me the emphasis on the boating took away from a pretty good story - not a great story. A dysfunctional family that may or may not have received healing by the end of the book really did nothing for me. If it was not a Jim Lynch book I probably would not have even finished it. Now there were good passages in the book and some interesting characters, but to me they took a back seat to the boats and the rigging and the jibs and everything else. Yes there are goodhearted people who work on boats, yes there are some nuts but the entire story just fell flat with regards to the elder Johannson's and Ruby, even though Ruby was one of my favorite characters the little bit she was in the book. Many others have praised this book, but for me it certainly did not live up to the levels Lynch achieved in his prior books which I really loved.

Sarah at Sarah's Book Shelves says

Behind the Wind is 100% up my alley and I have no idea why I'd never heard of it until Catherine at Gilmore Guide shoved it into my hands recently. It plops the dysfunctional family element of Ann Patchett's Commonwealth into a sailing environment with brilliant results.

"For years, sailing bound us. We were racers, builders and cruisers. It was our family business, our sport, our drug of choice. Yet eventually, sailing blew us apart, too."

Within the first five pages, Lynch delves into the psyche of sailors and boaters in general and his writing about sailing is filled with "yes, that's exactly how it is" moments.

"Sailboats attract the loons and geniuses among us, the romantics whose boats represent some outlaw image of themselves. We fall for these things, but what we're slow to grasp is that it's not the boats but rather those inexplicable moments on the water when time slows."

His sense of humor sparkles when making fun of sailing (i.e. a hilarious rant about the ridiculous sailing lingo) and when describing his family's quirks (of which there are many), but a genuine love for both shines through it all.

"Nobody forgets meeting my father. Loud, tall and meaty, he invades your space and claims the right-of-way. There is nothing moderate about him. A leader and a lout, a gentleman and an ass, he never concedes a weakness, admits a sickness or says he loves anybody. Yet the flip side is that when you please him, your body temperature climbs a degree or two."

As with many books I love, the suspense lies in what ends up happening to these characters. The questions of what made Josh's sailing prodigy sister (Ruby) abandon the sport, what shady antics are most of the family members up to now, and what incident figuratively blew up the family decades ago drove the novel's suspense. Lynch does go on sailing tangents fairly often, but I found them interesting because he adopts the tone of the rare tour guide that uses dry humor to make something you're not that interested in come alive.

Before the Wind is an underrated gem that you should read immediately if you're a fan of dysfunctional family stories...and, I can't wait to read more of Lynch's work.

For more reviews, visit my blog: <https://www.sarahsbookshelves.com/>

Sharron says

Great cast of characters and a good sense of place but the plot just didn't measure up. I expected a novel as wonderful as Border Songs but this wasn't it. It's definitely worth reading, especially if you've any interest in sailing, but otherwise adjust your expectations. Josh's dating reports are a hoot and provide needed humor.

Kathleen (QueenKatieMae) says

My dad has been recommending this book to me for two years now. He finally bought it and threw it at me last visit. My husband and I purchased a sailboat years ago and fell in love so he was positive I would like Before The Wind. I wasn't so sure but I started reading anyway. Page 2, I was hooked.

This book, other than recounting the life of a dysfunctional sailing family, captures all the weirdness, close calls, zealotry, frustration, love and lunacy that is sailing. Sailing can either be a soul-cleansing experience, a study in terror or a cuss-filled meltdown when you swear to Almighty Jesus you will never sail again. The author captured all those moments perfectly with a keen eye for the absurd. As I read, I was positive the author based the MC's marina mates on the liveabards at our marina. Sailing attracts all kinds.

It's a great book though those not sail-term-skilled will find themselves drowning in reefs, beams, knots, halyards, lines, jibs, jibes and "hard alee". It will be one of those reads when you skip over some words, like Russian names or space jargon or weirdly spelled magical kingdoms. Just remember that "port" is left, "starboard" is right, and the best way to remember is port and left both have four letters.

You will either love Josh's family with his sailing savant sister, Ruby, mathematician mom with her crush on Einstein, overbearing dad, anarchist brother and nordic god-loving grandpa, or you will not. At least enjoy Josh's colorful coworkers, fellow sailors, and his tales about Internet dating that he shares with them for their amusement.

There's no real plot, this is more like a memoir of a family that the author probably knows or a conglomeration of such. I can see that some readers might be bothered by a seeming lack of plot. In those moments when you think "what the hell...?" just reef your sails and enjoy the sensation of a windless day. When the wind picks up, tack along until you find yourself heeling, and laughing.

Rebecca McNutt says

I received a free copy of this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

Set for an April 2016 release date, *Before the Wind* is about the sheer thrill of boat racing, of sailing, the nautical atmosphere, the brisk wind... but at the end of the day, it's also the story of a remarkable and brilliant

yet very flawed and dysfunctional family. This book asks the question, "will they ever learn to let go of what can't be changed and come together again?"

Creative, vividly-detailed, emotional and gripping, *Before the Wind* combines a number of themes into one unforgettable story and introduces readers to a cast of characters as varied and different as things can get, with a multitude of talents, but it's up to all of them to keep their family together... and a boat race might be the best bet.

Mr. Gottshalk says

I abandoned this book after a little over 100 pages. Just couldn't get in to it for many reasons.

Angie Boyter says

Four generations of the Johannssen family have built and raced sailboats around Puget Sound. Sailing is the adhesive that unites the Johannssens, and it is a sailboat race that destroyed them. Now the family comes together for the first time in twelve years for the Swiftsure race. Sailing a classic Johannssen-designed-and-built Joho cruiser, they hope to salvage the futures of both their company and their family. *Before the Wind* is the story of a family and an obsession, crafted with the same meticulous attention to detail that the Johannssens would bestow on one of their boats.

Jim Lynch is known for his novels full of the atmosphere of the Pacific Northwest. His latest book is no exception, with a focus on sailing and the people who are in its thrall, from the possession-obsessed who buy wrecks they cannot afford to refurbish and leave them in the moorings for years at a time to the young couples who put their all into their boats and take off for round-the-world adventures with neither the skills nor the resources they need for success. As narrator Josh says, "Running a boatyard is like working in a dementia clinic."

The book is full of quirky but believable characters (Skeptics should just hang around a marina for a while!). They are fully realized but, at the same time, pithily described. There is father BoBo,Jr. , "A leader and a lout, a gentleman and an ass, he never concedes a weakness, admits a sickness or says he loves anybody." Mother is a high-school physics teacher who wrote an article for Sail magazine on the physics of sailing and who "might have understood Einstein better than she did us and never passed up an opportunity to explain and extol him." Black-sheep brother Bernard is the sort who "If he saw signs warning that SHOPLIFTERS WILL BE PROSECUTED, he looked for something to steal." Josh is in turn described by sister Ruby: "the one who thinks he can fix whatever's broken even though he knows it'll just break again." And then there is Grumps (aka BoBo, Sr.), the boatyard crew, and the denizens of the rundown marina where Josh lives and tries to fix everything, even though he knows it will break again. Even the boats have personality, like Princess, a boat "so beloved by its owner that jealous neighboring boats wouldn't speak to it."

The chapter titles also display the whimsical feel but attention to detail, opening with "Sailing like Einstein, continuing through "The International Sign of Fornication", and ending with "Nothing is Permanent". The pace is leisurely, but, as in sailing, it's the full experience that matters. If you're in a hurry, get yourself a "stinkpot" (motorboat) or its literary equivalent. If you want a really satisfying trip, try *Before the Wind*.

Catherine at The Gilmore Guide to Books says

At the most basic level Jim Lynch's new novel *Before the Wind* is the story of the Johannssens—a sailing family in Seattle, Washington. Or as Josh Johannsen's younger sister Ruby liked to claim "And there's a reason we're so good with boats: we have a higher salt content in our blood!" A fact which his long suffering older brother Bernard would point out was based on "one misleading blood test that showed Grumps had high sodium levels." His father and grandfather build and race boats and his mathematics loving mother uses the equations of physics and fluid dynamics to make them work best. In 2012 after a decade apart the family comes together again to compete in the Swiftsure International Yacht Race and there is nothing basic about their reunion.

A classic middle child, Josh is the fulcrum on which his family teeters. He's as quiet and steady as Bernard and Ruby are mercurial and unpredictable. For Bernard the increasingly obvious reality of what's wrong with the world leads him to take part in the WTO riots in Seattle after which he steals a boat and disappears. Years pass with random letters from other countries—he is taking on Japanese whaling vessels, selling pirated butterfly collections and sinking a greedy millionaire's yacht. While Bernard fights for his truth, Ruby gives for hers. Imbued with a funky spirituality she finds the wind in a flat sea that makes a boat speed across the water and erases people's pain with her massages. She is a gifted sailor, fluid and graceful on water, but clumsy as a toddler on land. In 1999 she throws the race that would have made her part of the 2000 Olympic sailing team and goes to South Africa as a volunteer on a medical ship.

A novel about a sailing family must include nautical terminology and references and *Before the Wind* does but not in a way that's forced. Instead, Lynch surfs from the playful when he compares an older boat's assessment to a doctor's exam of a middle-aged patient.

You tap her decking to check for rot (bone loss) and listen for structural weaknesses (bum hip or shoulder). You hunt for deep blisters in the hull (skin cancer) and see how worn out her sails (lungs) are and make sure her engine (heart) sounds reliable and that she hasn't been sailed so hard (lived so recklessly) that her rigging or mast step (adrenals) are fried.

The rest of my review can be read at The Gilmore Guide to Books: <http://gilmoreguidetobooks.com/2016/0...>

Larry H says

"Families split over money, betrayal and abuse, over resentments, infidelities and misunderstandings, over people being jackasses. Most anything can rattle the fault lines. Yet I know of only one family torn asunder by a sailboat race."

Joshua Johannsen has sailing in his blood. It's virtually all he and his siblings have known basically since birth. His grandfather designed sailboats, his father designed and raced them, and the two passed down this fever to Josh, his older brother Bernard, and their younger sister Ruby, a true sailing prodigy. They knew sailing terms and how to race boats in every weather condition better than they knew the English language or how to relax with any other pastime. Even their scientist mother plays a role, teaching them about the disbursement of air and water molecules, and how to measure the wind.

But something happened and everything changed. Josh, now 31, lives on a boat and repairs boats at a marina not far from his childhood home in Washington State. The family sailboat business has hit hard times and faces bankruptcy after too many lawsuits caused by their father's cutting corners. Their mother is becoming obsessed with solving a series of scientific equations that promise a significant monetary reward. And both his siblings have fled far away, Ruby to Africa, where she helps care for the poor and sick, and Bernard to who-knows-where, as he has become a fugitive and a champion of the working class.

"...strains of this gentle madness course through my family the way diabetes or alcoholism clusters in others. For years, sailing bound us. We were racers, builders and cruisers. It was our family business, our sport, our drug of choice. Yet eventually, sailing blew us apart, too."

It is Swiftsure, a famed sailing race, that brings the entire Johannssen clan together for one last hurrah. Sailing an old family boat altered by Josh (following his father's orders) to allow it to compete with the newer, faster crafts, their father hopes that this will be the moment that repairs all of the damage done through the years (although he's not quick to acknowledge his role in all of that damage), and restores the Johannssen name, reputation, and business. But the entire family is unprepared for what occurs, and the revelations that are revealed.

Jim Lynch may be one of the best writers you might never have heard of, and *Before the Wind* is a pretty terrific book. Lynch again returns to his beloved Pacific Northwest, and has created an utterly compelling portrait of a dysfunctional family both brought together and torn apart by their mutual obsession with sailing. This is beautifully written, emotionally gripping, humorous, and insightful.

I have one caveat for you: *Before the Wind* goes **heavy** on sailing terms. You may not know spinnaker from starboard, or boom from boat, but in the end, this is a story about a family, and you can guess what most of the terms mean. The book starts a little slowly, but much like a sailboat, it picks up speed and emotion and heft, until you're completely immersed. While I'd recommend any and all of Lynch's books, this is a great one to start with. I loved this.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com>....

Jill says

Jim Lynch is known for novels that are fertile explorations of microcosms of humanity that blossom into reflections of the complex whole. In *Before the Wind*, Lynch applies this technique to a story about the world of sailing, and an examination of a family intimately involved with the sailing business, the Johannssens.

Josh Johannssen, 31, going back and forth in time in alternating chapters, narrates what happened the last time his family experienced any harmony, before, as he puts it, his family's "big bang." Most of the Johannssens were legendary in the sailing world and had outsized personalities, except for Josh. Josh's father won a medal in the sailing Olympics, and raised his three children (Bernard, the oldest, Josh in the middle and Ruby the youngest) to be sailors as well, applying his perfectionist standards to their training. His unspoken goal, as Josh perceived it, was "to create a dynasty of Olympic-caliber racers...."

Ruby turned out to be the best sailor of all of them; she had a sense of the wind that inspired awe among other sailors. Bernard was more of a rebel with a temper he couldn't always control, and he went on to live a somewhat spectacular life as a pirate and smuggler. Josh stayed behind to carry on in the boat-building

business as the Johanssens had always done, albeit in an Olympia boatyard instead of with his father and grandfather back in Seattle. Josh was always smoothing things over, whether with his family or his acquaintances, much as he patched holes and sanded floors on boats, trying, according to his younger sister Ruby, “to keep everything and everybody intact.” It was his role in his family as well as in his career.

Josh lives on board a boat in the marina where he works, amidst a motley group of other “liveabards.” The denizens of the marina and Josh’s regular customers represent different visions of the quality and meaning of life. Josh thinks himself disappointingly ordinary, but like Doc in Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row*, he is the glue that makes all of them into a “family.”

Josh’s original family scattered to the four winds after a big blow-up following a race in which Ruby was competing. Nevertheless, Josh’s father gets a new boat for Josh to rehab just in case the whole family might come back together this year for one last race - the annual Swiftsure International Yacht Race that begins and ends near Victoria Harbour. But it is uncertain if they can all make it, for each has problems that even Josh can’t solve.

Discussion: This story considers the often overlooked difficulties that can ensue in trying to forge your own identity in light of the expectations of your family. Apt commentaries about family are occasionally made by Noah, a worker in Josh’s boatyard and a one-man Greek chorus, in the form of quotations from the movie “The March of the Penguins.”

Physics is also a strong motif. This is not only because sailing involves successful utilization of so many laws from physics, from the motion of sailboats, to how to adjust the sails to move through changes in the wind and water, to the effect of tides, velocity, and momentum. Josh’s mother was a high school physics teacher, and she influenced Josh as much as his dad did. Josh often thinks about the fact that sailing happened to be a favorite pastime of Albert Einstein. What was it about sailing that so appealed to this intellectual giant? Did the elemental meeting of land and sky inspire some of his ideas about the nature of the universe? Did it contribute to his understanding of gravity? Indeed, one might say the question of gravity, at least in its metaphorical sense, is one that preoccupies Josh, as he considers what it would take to pull the family back in one place again for another sailboat race. [Technically of course, according to Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity, gravity is not a force but rather the result of space-time warping around massive objects. Nevertheless, the fact that it is commonly thought of as something that pulls on you makes it an appropriate way to explain Josh’s concerns.]

Many sailors such as Ruby just have a “second sense” of forces acting on a sailboat without understanding the science behind it. But others, like Josh’s mom, go to great lengths to understand these laws. In fact, she is striving to solve the Navier-Stokes equations that describe the motion of fluids, such as ocean currents, the effects of turbulence on waves, and chaotic water flow generally.

But “chaos” can affect families too. How best to understand the dynamics that pull people apart and bring them together? The basic forces of physics can all be applied metaphorically to relationships, as can the phenomenon of quantum entanglement, more popularly known by Einstein’s designation as “spooky action at a distance.” This means that once (quantum) particles have been together, they essentially thereafter behave in ways related to one another, even if they happen to be at the opposite ends of the universe. This is also an apt way to describe the effect family members have on one another, long after they have gone their separate ways.

And finally, there appears another common theme in Lynch’s books: an appreciation for both the beauty of, and humor in, the teeming life on earth, with its many varieties, vagaries, and - among humans - struggles to

find meaning within a limited lifespan in an aleatory world. Lynch, through Josh, makes of Capital City Boatworks a Cannery Row, with the Johannssens offering an even closer look at the chaotic fluid determination of morality, family, identity, and love.

Evaluation: Jim Lynch is an excellent writer. His books are not quick reads, but rather are thoughtful explorations of characters who, no matter their particularities, are limned with sympathy and affection. His stories are also meditations on the diversity of all life on earth, the wonder it holds, and the importance of *paying attention* to everything around you and appreciating it while you can.

Anne says

Josh's family is a sailing family. His father and grandfather designed and built a line of sailboats that was quite popular in its time. They are now being replaced by faster, sleeker boats built out of more high tech materials. When they were little, Josh's younger sister Ruby had a magical touch with the wind and sails and was almost an Olympic contender. His older brother Bernard was the daredevil and would try anything when it came to sailing (and other things). Josh was often eclipsed by the other two, but now he is the one trying to hold the family (and the boats!) together.

If you like sailing, there are lots of sailing details here to keep you intrigued. If you like dysfunctional family drama, it's definitely in there. Seattle area setting was a bonus for me.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

Lots and lots of boat and sailing terminology in 'Before the Wind' which for me was dull. (Once longtime ago and far away, my husband and I owned a boat for three years. I discovered boating really sucks by the end of the second year.)

There is a story too, about a family - a father, a boating enthusiast, who wants his three kids to love boating too, and I liked it as far as I got because there was a lot of humor and irony. However, there also are lots and lots of racing boats, boating accidents, boat handling, boats in storms, boat competitions, etc. etc. etc.

Bleh.

Pamela says

I'm throwing in the towel. Too expletive heavy and sailing technical for my tastes. It seems much better suited to a manly man entrenched audience and/or obsessively passionate sailors. The writing, in general, seems quite good. Just not a good fit for me.

Michael says

I thoroughly enjoyed the book! It helped tremendously that I've sailed and even raced sailboats in a past life.

It would almost take a sailor to enjoy this book I think, because of the specific lingo used. But note that I said 'almost'; the story line and the characters would hold the interest of just about anyone. It also helped me to have sailed in some of the same waters mentioned, the San Juan and Gulf Islands, etc. , and I've been a spectator of the Swiftsure from a hillside west of Victoria. Very good book and I look forward to reading others by the same author!

JanB says

I love books about dysfunctional families and while I enjoyed that aspect of the book, the boating references dominated the story. I love the water but mostly from the beach or balcony or walking along the beach....not from inside a boat. After owning two boats (my husband's idea, not mine), I can say with certainty that I dislike boating. So why did I read this book? I read it based on a recommendation and had hoped the quirky dysfunctional bits and the humor would be enough to overshadow the actual boating, but unfortunately, it didn't work out that way.

I would recommend this for ardent fans of boating/sailing. The audiobook's narrator was excellent.
