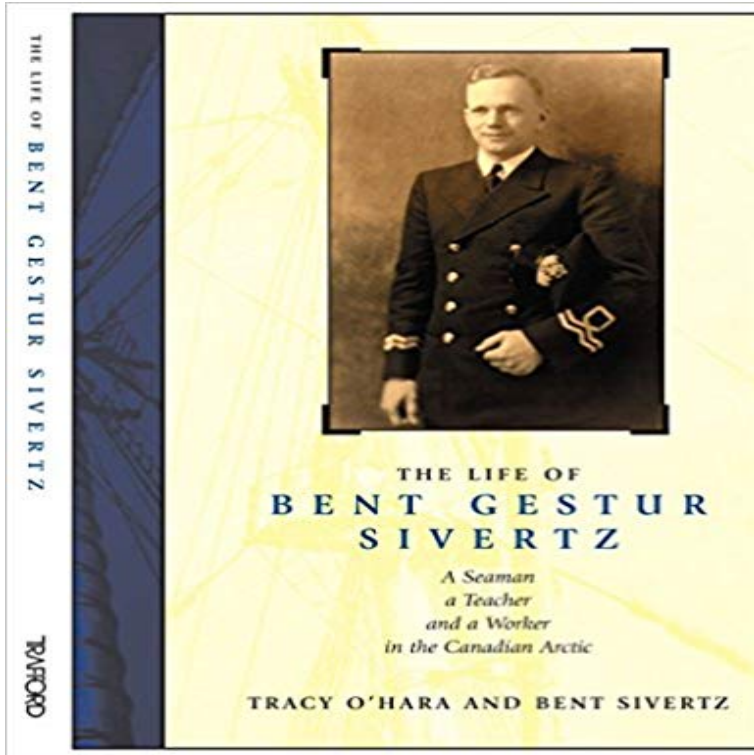


The Life of Bent Gestur Sivertz: A Seaman, a Teacher and a Worker in the Canadian Arctic



In 1995 I began working with Ben Sivertz, organizing his files and taking care of his sizeable written correspondence. This familiarized me both with the man and his prodigious personal archive containing letters, diaries, speeches, and employment and education records dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. I had the privilege of listening to an oral history colourfully recalled by a man still very much in possession of his faculties and a walking historical treasure. The stories of his life are fascinating and I felt, worthy of record. Over the course of five years a culling of information took the form of an autobiographical book, the writing of which was done by me, sandwiched between Ben's able storytelling and fine editorial ability. This is a joint project in the truest sense. Ben's life has spanned the century - he was born in Victoria to Icelandic immigrant parents and recalls Victoria's days at the beginning of the last century with valuable clarity. From rather modest origins Ben lived a life in three parts; as a seaman in the last days of wooden sailing ships, as a teacher in the remote northern end of Vancouver Island, as the head of the Naval Training Establishment at Kings College in Halifax during the Second World War, and as a government worker who became Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, remembered as one who left behind a progressive legacy of reform in the North. Ben has lived almost four decades since his retirement, outliving his wife and most recently relocating to Mayne Island to pass the remainder of his days surrounded by young and caring relatives.

In this story the reader will attain an understanding of seafaring in the early days on the West Coast, life on Vancouver Island in pre-war years, sailing ship adventures on the Pacific in the twenties, and government service in the halcyon days of External Affairs in the fifties and

northern affairs in the same period. It is a story that will delight many of Bens devoted pupils who came under his tutelage at the Naval Training School in Halifax during WWII, as well as the student of Canadian, and British Columbian history. It is well illustrated with many photographs from Bens personal collection, as well as copies of newspaper clippings. Tracy OHara

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