

WRACK LINES is published twice a year or as resources allow by the Connecticut Sea Grant College Program at the University of Connecticut. Any opinions expressed therein are solely those of the authors.

Electronic versions of this issue and past issues of *Wrack Lines* can be found at: <https://seagrants.uconn.edu/publications/wrack-lines/>

There is no charge for Connecticut residents, but donations to help with postage and printing costs are always appreciated. Visit: <https://uconn.givecorps.com/causes/7154-the-connecticut-sea-grant-fund>

Change of address, subscription information, cancellation requests or editorial correspondence should be sent to the address below:

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1080 Shennecossett Rd.
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CTSG-20-05
ISSN 2151-2825 (print)
ISSN 2151-2833 (online)



From the EDITOR

Thomas Merton admired the Shakers, whose communities sprang up from New England to his adopted home of Kentucky in the mid-19th century.

A Trappist monk best known for his 1955 book, *No Man is an Island*, Merton was once asked why the Shakers built the best buildings, when they thought the world would end any day.

He replied: "You don't understand. If you know the world could end at any minute, you know there's no need to hurry. You take your time and do the best work you possibly can."

As the coronavirus swept into full pandemic mode in March, production for this issue of *Wrack Lines* was just entering the busiest phase. Writers were sending me the stories I'd assigned weeks ago for editing. Revisions were being made, photos submitted, organized and selected, and our graphic designer, Maxine Marcy, was sorting and arranging all the pieces of the puzzle needed to make a magazine.

As the crisis worsened, I kept asking myself, "Is this work relevant?" But I forged ahead from my home office. I kept hoping for some confirmation for my belief that, yes, articles about people finding their antidote to despair about big global problems by doing what they can could be the salve people need. Still, the doubts lingered. The neighborhood where I live is just four blocks from a hospital where a drive-up virus testing lab is collecting samples. Passing the full parking lot on my daily walks, I could only imagine the courage it took for the nurses and doctors to keep coming to work every day. What was I doing?

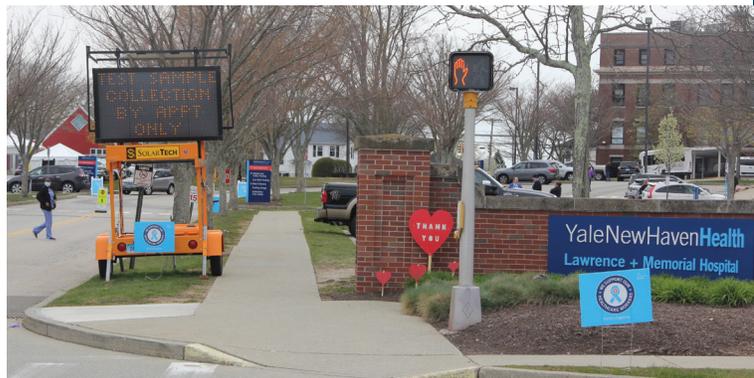
Then I came across the Merton quote. In a world suddenly unable to make any plans beyond the next day or two, my job was to call people's attention not to some new immediate crisis, but to the slower moving ones – plastic pollution and climate change. The theme of the issue, "Too Big? Too Late?" was asking readers to care about the future, and try to shape a better one like the people who share their stories in this issue. Looking past the present moment, and deciding that our actions can make a difference – even while so many things are out of our control – is what having hope is all about.

Wherever you are when this issue finds you, know that I and my partners in creating this magazine did the best work we possibly could to bring you something to inspire, challenge and encourage you. You'll read how Elizabeth Ellenwood applies her artistry to raise awareness about plastic, and how a team of UConn scientists parse the details of plastic pollution to figure out which kinds are the most harmful. Tessa Getchis tells the story of five months of teaching marine science at a girls school in the Dominican Republic, learning along with her students how to be part of solutions. Syma Ebbin shares her journey of following her concern for the environment far away then back at home, in her classroom and beyond. And Michael Pascucilla – a local director of health on the front lines of the coronavirus crisis – sets an example for a cleaner future with a solar-electric-powered pump-out boat.

What's your answer to "Too Big? Too Late?" After reading this issue, I hope you'd decide the answer is, "No. It's only too big and too late if we give up. And giving up is no way to live."



Judy Benson, editor
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Above photo: A sign for the drive-through coronavirus testing lab is posted at the entrance to Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London in mid-April, as a nurse wearing a face mask walks toward the entrance. Photo: Judy Benson

Cover photo: Photographer Elizabeth Ellenwood collects plastic trash at Napatree Point this spring to use in her cyanotype photographs. Photo: Tim Martin

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Judy Benson has been communications coordinator at Connecticut Sea Grant and editor of *Wrack Lines* since 2017. Before that, she was a newspaper reporter and editor, concluding her journalism career at *The Day* of New London covering health and the environment. Her creative nonfiction essays and opinion articles have been published in *Appalachia*, *Connecticut Woodlands*, Connecticut Hearst newspapers, the *Connecticut Mirror* and *The Day*. She earned both a bachelor's degree in journalism and a Master of Science in natural resources from UConn. She and her husband live in New London.