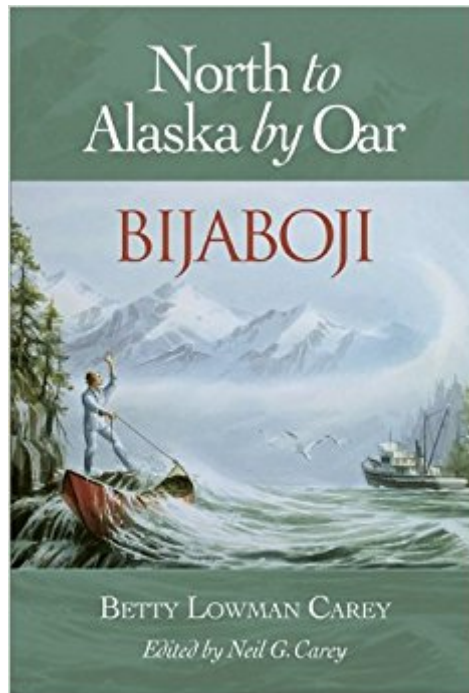


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# Bijaboji: North To Alaska By Oar



## Synopsis

Betty Lowman was 22 years old in June 1937 when she climbed into her beloved red dugout canoe Bijaboji and set out on a journey from Puget Sound to Alaska. Traversing some of the most treacherous waters on earth, the journey would have been a risky act for an extreme adventurer in any era; for a young woman in the conservative 1930s, it was a venture of almost unimaginable daring. Betty pulled it off, and now, 67 years later, she accomplishes an equal feat--a book of pure adventure. Bijaboji is a classic of boating literature worthy of a place beside *The Curve of Time* by Muriel Wylie Blanchet, whose coastal narrative dates from the same period. Betty slips through quiet water by moonlight, her oars dripping with phosphorescence. She goes deer hunting with a young Native man near Sechelt. She travels with a boat full of exuberant Boy Scouts for a few days and she visits lightkeepers, loggers, fishermen, doctors, missionaries and other coast dwellers who live in beautiful, isolated places and who speak openly about their lives, loves and politics. She also braves storms, rapids and blistering heat. In Douglas Channel Bijaboji capsizes and Betty loses her oars and everything she owns, except her boat and her sleeping bag. She is trapped on a precarious rock ledge for three harrowing days until rescued by Native fishermen. Through it all, she copes with her growing celebrity as people all along the coast watch for her, at the same time as they wait for news on the abdication of Edward VIII and on the disappearance of another female adventurer, Amelia Earhart. This is an amazing account written by a smart, strong, funny, independent woman with a glad heart and an abiding love of the BC coast.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Pat BurketteSpecial to Times ColonistOctober 24, 2004In the summer of 1937, ships and planes searched for aviatrix Amelia Earhart, lost in the Pacific while attempting the first round-the-world flight by a woman. But along B.C.'s Inside Passage, West Coasters kept a sharp lookout for the girl in the red canoe. The girl, who had dipped her oars in the waters off Guemes Island, Wash., on June 18, with the intent of rowing to Ketchikan, Alaska, was 22-year-old Anacortes resident Beatrice Annette Lowman, called Betty for short. The red canoe was Bijaboji (pronounced beejabogee), a cedar dugout. Betty's father, Ray Lowman, gave it to her on her 18th birthday, saying "Now it is yours, and it is a masterpiece of workmanship. It is like a Grand Banks dory, perfect for survival on the open sea. Be sure that your seamanship takes nothing away from the seaworthiness of this native canoe." Betty, the Lowman's eldest child, named the canoe using the first two letters of her brothers' names -- Bill, Jack, Bob and Jimmy. The newly released book *Bijaboji, North to Alaska by Oar* (Harbour Publishing, \$34.95) tells the page-turning story of Lowman's 1937 journey. Betty Lowman has been Betty Lowman Carey for 62 years. She lives in Sandspit with her husband, Neil Carey. Over the phone, 82-year-old Neil explains that Betty was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease a couple of years ago, and it affects some of her memory, so he'll do the talking for both of them. As editor of *Bijaboji*, Neil put together Betty's writings about her trip, including published articles and columns. Betty graduated from the University of Washington with a journalism degree, and worked as a newspaper reporter and magazine feature writer. Why did they wait so long? "I met Betty in 1940, and all this time, she's kept saying I'm going to write a book about that trip," says Neil. "But every day of life was so much pleasure we didn't get down to it. With Betty turning 90 the last day of July this year, I thought, by golly we better do it." Betty might have put off the book about the trip, but the trip itself was something she felt she had to complete. Ray Lowman forbade Betty's journey, saying it was too dangerous. "Seventy years ago, there was a limit to what girls could do," explains Neil. Betty invited a university friend, Florence Steele, to come along once her father had left for the Alaskan canneries in his boat, *Una Mae*. Flo, worried about the smallpox epidemic that had devastated the coast decades before, got a vaccination. By the time they reached Garden Bay in Pender Harbour, with Betty doing all the rowing, Flo, ill from the shot, decided to go back home. Betty was then about 240 kilometres from home with 1,100 or more kilometres to go. Alone at sea, she was in her element, rowing day and night, working tides and weather, singing ditties like Greig's *My Mind is Like a Peak Snow-Crowned*, and sleeping in the rough on bits of beach or a pile of drift logs. "There were millions of stars overhead and a familiar constellation or two," she writes of a night row to Cortes Island. "I was alone, ecstatic, free of self-consciousness about my muscular 160 pounds, free of know-it-alls trying to tell me what equipment I would have bought for the trip if I

weren't crazy. If I weren't so broke and loving it!" Betty's sparse gear included sleeping bag, cooking kit, horsehide gloves to prevent blisters, hunting knife and waterproof container of matches. She had no compass, watch or money. She quickly found her niche in a water world "where material possessions counted for nothing if you did not have brains, strength and ability." Not to mention determination. "Every other white person I knew of who had gone north in a hand-propelled craft had taken a steamer across the strait from Alert Bay," she writes of her intention to row across wind-swept Queen Charlotte Strait. "Afterward, all said they could have rowed or paddled across. I wanted to do it. Not to wish I had." In isolated homesteads and settlements along the coast, she met like-minded pioneering people, who recognized her as one of their own. Betty was fed the favoured breakfast of bacon and eggs, sent on her way with huge sack lunches, offered baths, given bunks in tugboats, fishing trollers and cabins, and taken on side-trips. Bijaboji is a trip through B.C.'s history. Some of the places Betty visited have gone, and some remain. Early in the journey, Betty and Flo landed on a beach on Saltspring Island. They were welcomed into a nearby farmhouse by a "smiling, hunched-over Scots lady" who served hot tea steeped over coals scraped onto the hearth. "The lady would have been Aunty Madge," says Saltspring's Dan Caldwell instantly. His family still owns Walker's Hook, where the beach is located. Old apple and plum trees still stand, but only a few remnants of that farmhouse remain. "Her name was Margaret Sinclair Caldwell, and she was actually Irish, but she was a Glasgow-trained nurse," says Caldwell. "She died in 1940, when she was 80. She was a midwife and set off walking through the woods to attend a birth. She never made it." But Betty's tales of thriving coastal resource-based industry, the canneries, logging camps and trollers along the Inside Passage, speak of bygone times. And could anything have changed as much from then to now as communications? Betty called home by mail or telegraph. News came by newspaper or radio. At Sointula, Betty, herself by then the topic of newspaper articles and radio reports, listened to a broadcast about the search for a missing Amelia Earhart. A fisherman admonished Betty. "No woman is worth it. You better hitch a ride across the strait with us or there'll be planes and cutters out looking for another dizzy dame." "I did not know the famous aviatrix," writes Betty of her role model, "but felt a kinship, plus respect and admiration." Neither of the so-called "dizzy dames" -- Earhart, who was not to celebrate her 40th birthday July 24, and Betty, who turned 23 rowing Bijaboji on July 31, fit the 1930s feminine mould. When a watchman tells Betty "A woman is a success when she has been loved, envied and hated," she replies, "That puts me on the failure track. Few men or women would bother to hate me because the things I enjoy and do are not explicitly feminine. None would envy me because I do not excel at the things a girl is expected to excel at and, so far as love goes, I am two weeks over 23 years old and have never been kissed in

the moonlight." Earhart, asked by the French press "Can she bake a cake?" after receiving flying awards, said, "So I accept these awards on behalf of the cake bakers and all of those other women who can do some things quite as important, if not more important than flying, as well as in the name of women flying today." Both Betty and Earhart found supportive husbands who put together books about their lives. George Palmer Putnam published Amelia's letters to him, as *Last Flight*. Betty said she was not "out for a stunt." Her journey was about meeting an individual mental and physical challenge, which is at the core of all adventures. The challenge became huge when Betty swamped in Douglas Channel, losing everything but her canoe and her life. After rescue, naysayers said Betty was crazy to go on. "I rushed out of the cabin to get hold of myself," she writes, "saying over and over in my mind that I would rather drown than arrive in Ketchikan aboard a powerboat. I'd drown myself before I'd let anybody say, 'I told you, a girl couldn't do it.'" But a girl did do it. Betty Lowman rowed into Ketchikan on Aug. 19, 1937, delighting a proud father. With side trips, she'd covered 2,092 kilometres, twice what she'd planned. The trip changed her life, making her a celebrity. She became a much-in-demand public speaker, travelling all over North America. Betty was 27 when she met Neil Carey, then 19 and in the U.S. Navy. She became a navy wife a year later, and the couple raised two sons, George and Gene. If adventurous female achievement is inspirational, a torch passed from Amelia Earhart to Betty Carey also lit a fire in George, father of two girls. He realized girls were short-changed in physical education in school and started the Volleyball Club in California, which now has 10,000 girls aged 12 to 18 playing volleyball. "Most," says Neil, "get offered college volleyball scholarships." Neil and Betty retired to the Queen Charlottes. "The isolation and beauty of the place was what attracted us. We've got enough in our heads to keep us busy. We wanted a nice quiet relaxed life." And Bijaboji? In 1963, when Betty was 49, she rowed from Ketchikan to Anacortes, sometimes covering 40 miles a day. She took short trips in her canoe until 1999, when the manager of the Sandspit Airport asked if Bijaboji could be displayed in the air terminal for a couple of weeks. The dugout, which Betty calls "the world's best and most beautiful sea-going vessel," is still there. Pat Burkette lives on Salt Spring Island. "Bijaboji has all the elements of a classic novel: a consistent story thread, suspense, a dramatic climatic point, and wonderful detail of the milieu and the characters." — Pat Carrie Smith, Prince Rupert Daily News "Bijaboji bubbles with energy and movement, much like the straits, channels and saltwater inlets through which [Carey] travelled..." — Nicole Pankratz, The Vancouver Sun

Betty Lowman Carey followed her passion for adventure into such diverse occupations as newspaper reporter, magazine feature writer, lifesaving instructor, teacher and commercial

fisherman. Betty and Neil Carey have been married 62 years and live in Sandspit, BC. Betty Lowman Carey and Neil Carey have been married 62 years and live in Sandspit, BC.

You have to appreciate that this book is the diary of an amazing journey that took place in the summer of 1937. It is an account of 22 year old Betty Lowman (Carey) who rowed from Anacortes, Washington to Ketchikan, Alaska in an hand carved cedar dug out canoe barely 14 feet long. The Strait of Georgia, Johnstone Strait, Queen Charlotte Sound and the Inside Passage can be treacherous and a challenge in a 31 ft. sailboat or any modern boat as we can attest to even in the summer. That Betty rowed her dugout canoe and recorded her experience and reflections these many miles is an astounding feat of courage, strength, both physically and emotionally and optimism. You also have to appreciate that in those times you couldn't get weather reports, didn't have GPS, proper charts and navigational aids especially in a canoe! The book also captures a time and place along the B.C. coast of canneries, lighthouse keepers, fish towns, logging and the many varied, interesting people who inhabited the coast and islands. I thoroughly enjoyed this delightful book and felt as if I was part of her adventure and what an adventure it was! Betty inspired me on a recent cruise we took on our boat to different waters. I kept thinking if Betty could do something like this I certainly could be brave as well. NO wasn't an option for this remarkable young woman in a time when most women wouldn't even dream of such an undertaking (nor would they now). She may seem a bit naive and overly optimistic but she had a confidence and determination that is infectious. It is a great read and a great historical account of a time long gone in B.C. coastal history. I highly recommend this book (Betty also rowed from Ketchikan back to Anacortes in "Bijaboji" when she was 47). Even if you don't live in the Pacific Northwest or British Columbia, you will be drawn into Betty's journey and into the lives of the people she meets along the way. "Bijaboji" (named for brothers Bill, Jack, Bob and Jim) is now on view at the Maritime Heritage Center in Anacortes, Washington.

Great book, but perhaps because I live in the town where the author started from in her red dugout canoe. The canoe is in the local museum.

If you've read "Row to Alaska By Wind & Oar" by Pete and Nancy Ashenfelter, you will enjoy this book more. It's the same place only in 1937 and rowed by a woman just out of college using a dugout canoe and oars. The book was only recently finished having been a lifetime project for the author. But it's full of really nice B&W photos of the journey and enough detail that if you were

planning this trip it would give you an idea about where the dangerous water lies and the kind of things you might want to bring. A great armchair adventure.

great

This was a pleasant surprise, a very enjoyable read and a fascinating story. The more obscure "homegrown" memoirs like this can sometimes be rambling and tedious, but this wasn't. It was engaging, interesting, colorful, and so very candid and emotionally honest.

I enjoy stories based on true adventures. Amazing what women can do when they set their minds to something.

A great read, and a real eye opener about how much this part of the world has changed. A good book for those interested in the upcoming Race to Alaska.

Super interesting book, very fun read!

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