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Joseph Mitchell of The New Yorker specialized in people and institutions at the margins of society. Old Mr. Flood is his story about a retired house wrecker who plans to live to 115 years old on a diet of fresh seafood, harbor air and the occasional Scotch whiskey.

Old Mr. Flood Details

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From Reader Review Old Mr. Flood for online ebook

Jos says

Small stories about small people in a small cosmos in a time past. To relish those stories, it helps to have a fondness for grumpy old men, odd food and plain story-telling. Otherwise, the glimpses of the daily life of fishmongers in New York's eastside of the late 40's will leave you cold.

The three stories are fictional stories which is unusual for Mitchell who mostly wrote real-life essays for New Yorker. Nonetheless, they are inspired by real persons Mitchell met at the Fulton fish market. These are average working-class people. They have their quirks as everybody, they are happy or sad. Nothing outstanding but described so vividly that it feels like you just visited this market and ate some quahog oysters. Not this fancy bouillabaisse stuff every gourmet is raving about nowadays, just plain old American food. Better ignore this nonsense about a healthy living they tell you on this modern invention, radio. Now, where can I try some sea urchins?

Aimee says

I wish I could meet Mr. Flood, the 93 year old seafoodetarian at the heart of Mitchell's story. What a guy! This book brings alive the sights, sounds, and smells of the Fulton Fish Market in 1940s New York City. Along with Mr. Flood, I enjoyed getting to know the other characters that are part of Mr. Flood's daily life. Did Mr. Flood make it to 115 as was his hope? The reader is left with that question unanswered. I choose to believe he did.

Jim says

Why have I not read everything that Joseph Mitchell ever wrote? When I read **The Bottom of the Harbor** a number of years ago, I was enthralled by Mitchell's brand of journalism-as-literature. Today, I found a copy of **Old Mr. Flood** being remaindered. I not only snapped it up, but roared through it in a single sitting.

Both books I have mentioned deal primarily with the world of New York Harbor, comprising the boatmen, buyers and sellers of fish, and anyone else even remotely connected with the getting and distribution of seafood. What makes them particularly poignant is that the world has changed. Oysters are no longer a major part of the American diet, when at one time they were perhaps **the** main source of protein in coastal American cities.

Now we have factory ships, fish farms with diseased fish, and the price still keeps going up for a commodity whose quality continues to plummet. Mitchell not only reminds us this wasn't always so, but he has such a canny ear for dialog that it is a positive joy to read him.

TLP says

Joseph Mitchell is a wonderful storyteller. I thoroughly enjoy his characters and his ability to portray the backdrop of NYC in a way that is as alive as the real thing.

Duncan says

Picking up this book is like pulling on a pair of comfy slippers.

Beautifully written in that spare journalistic style of New Yorker columnists. Thurber sans humour. He humour is replaced by Flood's common sense observations on modern life - many still relevant today - eg why put vitamins into food that God originally created with vitamins in it?

The author also captures a moment in time, as Balzac might have done, mid-century New York. Told through the eyes of the people living their lives in and around the fish market, rather than from the perspective of a heroic protagonist. This refreshes, like the cool slip of a quahog down the throat with a dash of lemon.

There is also a touch of Melville in there with the careful cataloguing of all the various types of seafood Mr Flood pursues.

Delightful read.

James says

This is a short, simple account of the staunchly independent and seafood-obsessed Mr. Flood, an elderly bachelor who is determined to live to be 115 and thinks he knows just how to do it. It's also a wonderful sketch of life in lower Manhattan during the 1930s-1940s. The writing is crystal clear and smooth, making the simplicity of Hemingway's work look like James Joyce, and to be honest, Mitchell has none of Hemingway's egoisms or his choppy style (I like most of Hemingway, but admit it, the guy writes dialogue like a film script that has seen the underside of a lawn mower). There's no "plot" to this 120-page story; the author simply discusses life, death, religion, food, whiskey, and the various characters in Mr. Flood's life over several encounters, and every stitch of it is amusing, charming, and honest. This is my first taste of Mitchell and it will not be my last. It's a fantastic character study, and thus it's a must read for any writer. Even better, the book contains addresses of the various seafood restaurants, hotels, and bars mentioned throughout. I'll have to go see if any are still standing and partake of a fine "Flood-ian" meal!

Timons Esaias says

I am one of the devotees of the cult of Joseph Mitchell. I was introduced to his work (O Happy Day!) by Noel Perrin's book *A Reader's Delight*, which advised me to go forth and read *The Bottom of the Harbor*. [Perrin was one of the causes of the "Mitchell revival" that brought all his books back into print.] I did so, and have just about worked my way through the canon (rereading *The Bottom of the Harbor* in the meantime) in the years since. Last year I read *My Ears Are Bent*, and this year it was time for this one.

The occasion for reading it was that I was flying halfway across the country to visit a dying in-law, which turned into a trip to the funeral. I will tell you that reading Mitchell made me feel better, it quieted the soul, it reminded me that there is beauty in life and in writing.

In Charles McGrath's foreword, he compares Mitchell to Twain for uniqueness of voice, and then makes this strong, and perfectly defensible, claim: "If Mitchell wasn't the single best writer who ever appeared in The New Yorker, then it was a tie between him and E. B. White."

This work is a form of what is now called "creative nonfiction" in that it reads like reportage, but the title character is an amalgam of several people, including, it is strongly felt, Mitchell himself. The details are all real, just not entirely true. The book is a collection of three related long pieces that came out in 1944 and 1945.

Mr. Flood is a retired gentleman who is in love with the Fulton Fish Market (in its original location), and the whole trade of seafood, from trap to belly. He is a "character" and he gravitates to other characters, which makes for good storytelling. Mitchell is showing us the acts that we put on to get through life, and telling us the stories that pass the time.

Favorite lines:

"Twain and [Haywood] Broun are Mr. Flood's favorite writers. 'If I get to heaven,' he once said, 'the first Saturday night I'm up there, if it's OK with the management, I'm going to get hold of a bottle of good whiskey and look up Mr. Twain and Mr. Broun. And if they're not up there, I'll ask to be sent down to the other place.' A moment later he added uneasily, 'Of course, I don't really mean that. I'm just talking to hear myself talk.' "

"He had the habit of remarking to bartenders that he didn't see any sense in mixing whiskey with water, since the whiskey was already wet."

[Regarding the former Still's Oyster and Chop House] "'Oh, God, Hughie,' said Mrs. Treppel, 'it was a wonderful place. I remember it well. It had a white marble bar for the half-shell trade, and there were barrels and barrels and barrels of oysters stood up behind this bar, and everything was nice and plain and solid -- no piddling around, no music to frazzle your nerves, no French on the bill fare; you got what you went for.'"

This is a lovely gem of a book. I look forward to reading it again.

Reacher says

Mitchell has a very different writing style than you see in fiction today. Use of short, clear, simple sentences with an active voice. Hyper descriptive, short on metaphors. This is a mesmerizing story, and one that will energize you next time you're feeling old or sorry for yourself. It also touched off my fascination with eating raw oysters (that's where I can be found most Friday evenings now, at one of the many \$1 raw bars here in Boston, with a lemon wedge in my hand and a smile on my face)..

Jigar Brahmhatt says

When this book was written, Depression was a fresh memory and New York was changing, and so was the world. Mr. Flood, a spirited old man in his 90s, who was charming in his own eccentric way, ate only seafood, had curious opinions on almost everything, and who was fierce in his desire to live till 115 of age, was a subject worthy of Joseph Mitchell. The traces of the world he inhabited have long wiped out. Flood, along with many other characters, in and around the Fulton Fish Market now survive only in the archives of New Yorker, and in generous reprints of Mitchell's gorgeous books. We can readily connect to their laments that surprisingly sound relatable still. Here's one in which Mr. Flood uses a stainless steel knife:

"Stainless Steel. They don't care if it's sharp or not, just so it's stainless, as if anybody gave a hoot about stains on a knife blade. I wish they'd leave knives alone, quit improving them. Look at it. Shiny. Stainless. Plastic handle. Only one thing wrong with it. It won't cut."

Mitchell was a master in getting out of the way and letting the characters speak. He is never bothering you with too much of himself. It works amazingly well here. He'd make you think that a book with just Mr. Flood talking would be nothing less than literature.

Tyler says

"When I was a boy on State Island, hens ate grit and grasshoppers and scraps from the table and whatever else they could scratch out of the ground, and a platter of scrambled eggs was a delight."

"...and one was a captain of a seiner in the old Long Island Sound gurry-fleet that caught moss-bunkers for fertilizer factories."

"'I've got a pig toe, a pistol grip, a heel splitter, a warty back, a maple leaf, a monkey face, a rose bud, a rabbit's foot, and a butterfly,' he says with pride. 'I *had* a washboard, a lady finger, and a mule ear, but I came home one night in poor order and I was reeling around and I couldn't find the light cord and they were on the floor and I stepped on them.'"

"...an exuberance of clams."

"The meat was a rosy yellow, a lovely color, the color of flesh next to the stone of a freestone peach."

"I come from the womb and I'm bound for the tomb, the same as you, the same as King George the Six, the same as Johnny Squat."

"He is slight, edgy, and sad-eyed, a disappointed man, and he blames all his troubles on cellophane."

etc etc etc

Alice says

I CANNOT CONCEIVE OF A SITUATION WHERE I WOULD GIVE THIS FEWER STARS.

patty says

This book isn't about one Mr. Flood - it's about several characters working at or hanging out at the Fulton Fish Market along the East River in Manhattan in the early part of the twentieth century. Serious fishermen along the East Coast would love this book. Apparently "industry" started to take out these prime oyster and clam beds over 100 years ago. Destruction of wildlife by pollution comes up several times in the book. What would these characters think today?

Gust says

4,5 stars

Erin Boyington says

Old Mr. Flood is determined to live to 115 on his steady diet of whiskey, oysters, and good stories in these wonderful *New Yorker* pieces.

This book makes me so sad that the only "oysters" near me are the Rocky Mountain kind (and yes, I've tried them - deep-fried). When I lived in Seattle, a few friends and I made a day trip to Quilcene to go oyster hunting. I had never eaten an oyster before, and was unsure I would enjoy the taste or the texture. Raw shellfish? What? But being a fan of sushi (shout-out to Baek Chun Sushi, the most amazing sushi I've ever had, believe it or not), I decided to give oysters a chance.

My friends and I went out in our boots in the oily tidal flat mud, gathered up a number of thick knobby shells in a bucket, and went back to the beach to pry them open. All we had - and all we needed - was Sriracha and lemon juice. We cracked the oysters open in the cool winter sunshine and slurped them out of their brine, discarding the empty shells on the beach. The oysters, as it happened, were sublime. I have dreams about those oysters.

I'm with the Walrus.

But I won't eat seafood in a state with no ocean view; no oysters for me in Colorado.

So when I read about *Old Mr. Flood* in one of my favorite book blogs, I immediately bought it on my Nook. It's made up of three short *New Yorker* pieces from 1948, basically character studies of a vigorous old man named - you guessed it - Mr. Flood. Obsessed with living to 115 on his diet of seafood and whiskey, he tells stories to the narrator and is pretty much great at being an old man, living the good life.

Coming straight from *An Unnecessary Woman* by Rabih Alameddine, I was ready for another lovely character study, despite the fact that I'm normally only hooked by a fast-paced story. But these pieces made

me willing to also check out more of Joseph Mitchell's collected short stories about the denizens of New York City: *Up in the Old Hotel* .

I lift my glass of 12-year Scotch to you, Mr. Flood, and to you, Mr. Mitchell. Sláinte.

Quotable:

"Ask the man for half a lemon, poke it a time or two to free the juice, and squeeze it over the oysters. And the first one he knifes, pick it up and smell it, the way you'd smell a rose, or a shot of brandy. That briny, seaweedy fragrance will clear your head; it'll make your blood run faster. And don't just eat six; take your time and eat a dozen, eat two dozen, eat three dozen, eat four dozen." - 14

"'Well,' he said, 'there are days when I hate everybody in the world, fat, lean, and in between, and this started out to be one of those days, but I had a drop to drink, and now I love everybody.'" - 30

Adam says

Crank, codger, salty old coot? Sure, Mr. Flood is all of that, but he's also 100% original American (from that time when we had originals, before television, political correctness, and wireless techno-selves). Even in his mid 90s he speaks his mind without hesitation, drinks his liquor straight, and has a good 10,000 stories on tap to amuse and educate--and even if he's told you most of them before, it won't stop him from doing so again. Yes, it's *homo americanas*: tough, crass, filled with bizarre imaginings, a self-involved exterior thinly disguising a generous and endearing heart.
