

CLARE VANDERPOOL

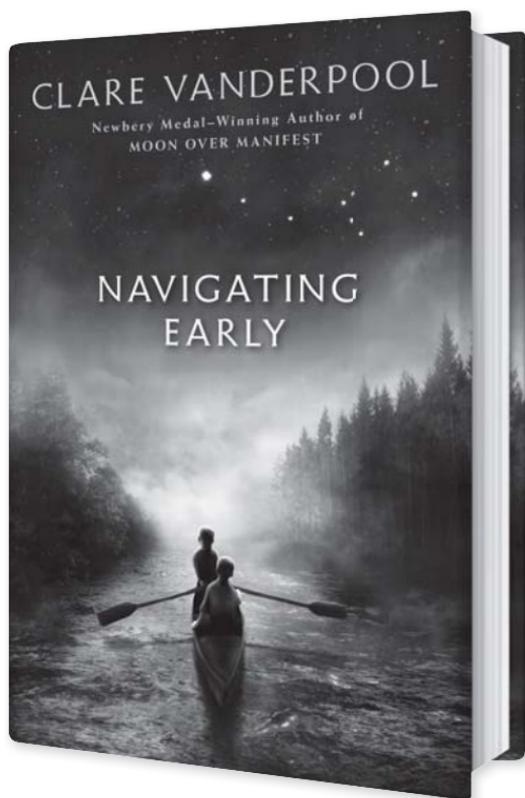
Newbery Medal–Winning Author of
MOON OVER MANIFEST

NAVIGATING EARLY



CHAPTER SAMPLER AND Q&A WITH AUTHOR!

NEW FROM NEWBERY MEDAL-WINNING AUTHOR
CLARE VANDERPOOL!



The odyssey-like adventure of two boys' incredible quest in the Appalachian Trail where they face pirates, buried secrets, and extraordinary encounters—along with truths that they never expected.

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NAVIGATING EARLY



CLARE VANDERPOOL

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KEEP READING FOR A SNEAK PEEK . . .

PROLOGUE

If I'd known what there was to know about Early Auden, that strangest of boys, I might have been scared off, or at least kept my distance like all the others. But I was new to the Morton Hill Academy for Boys, and to Cape Fealty, Maine. Fact was, I was new to anyplace outside of north-eastern Kansas.

I've heard it said that Kansas has a long-standing history of keeping its sons and daughters close to home, but in recent years there have been some notable exceptions. General Eisenhower, for one. Everyone was so proud of the way he led the Allied forces during the war with Germany. He came back to Abilene for a big parade, but once all the hoopla died down, he left. I don't think he plans on taking up residence again anytime soon.

My father is in the armed services too. Captain John Baker, Jr. He's in the navy. You know what they say. There's two kinds of fellas: navy men and those who wish they

were. My father heard that from his father, Rear Admiral John Baker, Sr. I'm the third John Baker in a row. Believe me, I'd rather be a whole of something than just a third. But you get what you get and you are what you are. That saying comes from my mom's side of the family. The civilians. They're the fun side. They call me Jack. My mom calls me Jackie. At least she used to.

But things changed. That's how I ended up at the edge of the country. To say I was a fish out of water would be a good expression but the wrong way to put it. Because there I was, a landlocked Kansas boy standing on shifting sands at the ocean's edge. And all I could do was burrow my feet down deep so I wouldn't get swept away.

I wasn't a complete stranger to sand. There was a good-sized sandpit near our house. And I'd read a story put out by the National Geographic Society that told of whole dinosaurs being found in the Kansas plains. They think Kansas might have once been covered in water, and after the water was gone, it was the sand and soil that kept the dinosaur bones from being scattered and lost.

Early Auden knew all about sand. But growing up in Maine, he had a whole ocean lapping up on his shore, washing it away. The first time I saw Early he was filling bag after bag with sand and stacking them like bricks. Just what he was trying to keep from washing away, I didn't know. It was a crazy thing he was doing, but something in me understood it. I just watched him—sandbagging the ocean.

I knew Early Auden could not hold back the ocean. But that strangest of boys saved me from being swept away.

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Walking into the cafeteria that first day, I remembered the headmaster's words of advice about sitting with a group in the lunchroom.

As much as I would have preferred to be by myself right then, I made my way through the lunch line, picked up my tray of meat loaf, green beans, and Jell-O with banana slices, then ventured over to a table of boys I recognized from some of my classes.

One boy—it was the chubby Sam Feeney—moved over easy enough as he continued the conversation. “Anybody who thinks you can outrun a cutter with a gig is a pinhead. Let’s ask the new kid. Baker, which is faster? A cutter or a gig?”

I had no idea what they were talking about, so I took the safe way out. I shrugged and said, “Six of one, half dozen of the other.”

“Well, what about the oars?” asked Robbie Dean. “Do you prefer whiffs, wherries, or rum-tums?”

“Oh, you know. Whiffs or wherries, usually. But rum-tums’ll do in a pinch.”

They looked at me steadily, I’m sure wondering what to make of me, when Preston Townsend said, “So, what brings an inlander like you to Maine?” The way he asked the question, I decided his dad was probably a lawyer instead of the governor.

I felt my face get hot. “Just needed a change of scenery, I guess,” was my weak reply.

“I hear it’s so flat in Kansas that you can see all the way to the next state in every direction,” Sam said. “Is that true?”

“I wouldn’t know,” I said. “What with the waving wheat and the brilliant sunsets, I guess we don’t bother to look too far away.” I was putting up a good front, but my diversionary lines were running out. One more question and my jitters would probably show through in either spilled milk or dripping sweat. Thinking fast, I decided to shift the focus to someone else’s strangeness. “So, what’s with the kid who never shows up to class?” I asked.

“Early Auden?” Preston answered. “Not much to tell. His dad was on the board of trustees, had a heart attack and died. So now the kid gets a free ride here, but he picks and chooses what classes he wants to show up for. Sometimes he takes a seat and then leaves as soon as the teacher says something he disagrees with. He’s so weird that nobody does anything about it.”

“Yeah,” Sam piped in. “Last year he walked out of biol-

ogy class and never came back just because Mr. Nelson said there are no venomous snakes in Maine. Early insisted there are still timber rattlesnakes up north and walked out.”

“How come he’s so sure there are timber rattlesnakes?” I asked.

“Who knows. He’s all-fire sure about most things. Sometimes he has these weird fits when his eyes go all blank and he kind of twitches. They think having those fits messed up his brain somehow.”

The bell rang, ending any further discussion about the odd boy. But I knew there had to be more to the story than that.

“See you at PE, Baker. And don’t forget your rum-tums.” Preston smirked as he got up from the table.

Coach Baynard stood at the deep end of the indoor pool, light reflecting off the water, which was in turn splashing ripples of light on the tile wall. The air was thick and moist, with the sharp scent of chlorine. He gave his whistle a firm blast that echoed around the room. Boys in black swim trunks lined up, displaying an assortment of bare legs: long, short, mostly skinny, a few chunky, hairy, white, knobby kneed, gangly, awkward.

Coach blew his whistle again, “All right, you yay-hoos, let’s see what you can do with this.” He hefted a ten-pound weight off the floor and threw it into the deep end. “Dive in, then push or carry the weight as far as you can without coming up for air. Once you surface, that’s your distance. Robbie Dean. You’re up.”

Dean stood at the pool’s edge, raising his spindly arms

with hands clasped above one shoulder, then the other, as if he were the reigning underwater-weight-moving champion of the world. "Let me show you how it's done, fellas."

After a few catcalls from the crowd he grinned and dove into the water.

The rest of us watched from the deck as he frog-kicked his way to the bottom, first pushing, then pulling on the weight. Robbie Dean got it halfway up the sloped floor before he came to the surface, sputtering and grinning. "Beat that, boys," Robbie Dean called.

The boys on deck pointed and hollered as the weight slipped back to its starting position at the bottom of the deep end. "You really showed us. Yeah, give us another lesson, why don'tcha?"

Sam Feeney was next. He got the brick up the incline before he had to come up for air. Preston Townsend did the best, pushing the brick halfway across the pool.

The coach called out another name. "Baker. You're up." I looked around, surprised, thinking there must be another Baker, then realized he was looking at me. "Come on, son. You know how to swim, don't you?"

Of course I could swim. My mom took me to the pond near our house from the time I was little. I could swim faster and hold my breath longer than any boy close to my age.

"I can swim," I answered, taking my place at the pool's edge. My big toe pressed into the eight-foot marker, etched in red. The lights playing on the tile wall left me feeling unsteady. But with everyone's eyes on me, I dove in.

I swam easily to the bottom, down by the drains. There

was the ten-pound brick, waiting for me to be the first one to push it all the way across the pool. But something else caught my attention. Something shiny, glimmering. A ring? I knew it had to be my imagination. My navigator ring was nowhere near this pool. Still, something shimmered near the drain. I'd been so excited when my dad gave me the ring, just before he left for the war. That was back when I thought it could make me a navigator like him, guiding a ship by the light of the stars. And that with that ring, I could always find my way. But after the scout survival camp last July, which I barely survived, I knew these things weren't true. Like I'd told my mom, it was just a stupid ring. But now it weighed heavily on me, pulling me under.

I reached for it in the bottom of the Morton Hill pool, the deep water pressing in around me. My ears hurt and my lungs were bursting. Then I couldn't see it anymore. Nothing glimmered. But it had been there. I pulled on the metal drain cap. It wouldn't budge. I felt sleepy, like my eyes couldn't stay open anymore. But I had seen it. It had been there.

Suddenly, I felt strong hands clamp around my arms and pull me toward the surface. Air. Light still splashed on the tile walls. And lots of faces stared at me.

Coach pulled me toward the side and some other hands dragged me out of the water.

"Is he breathing?" Robbie Dean whispered.

I sputtered and coughed, answering his question.

"Move out of the way," Coach barked. "Hey, Baker?"

What were you doing? You were under for over a minute and didn't even touch the brick."

"I . . . I . . ." Tears were lurking just behind my eyes. "I feel kinda sick," I muttered.

"Right. You do look a little pale. Hit the locker room, kid. You'll get it next time."

It had been there, that shiny ring.

I grabbed a towel and stumbled my way to the locker room, only to hear a group of upperclassmen whooping and snapping towels at each other. I'm no genius, but even as cloudy-headed as I felt just then, I knew my skinny white legs would be all too easy a target in there.

So I opened the first door I came to and followed the stairs down a flight, to the open doorway of a dimly lit workroom. My head still spun as I leaned back into the coolness of the metal door marked *Custodian*. I closed my eyes, waiting for the feeling to pass, remembering.

Our Boy Scout survival outing was in the woods of northeastern Kansas. The scout leader set each of us out on a course that we'd have to navigate using only landmarks, the stars, and our wits. We'd been preparing for weeks. We'd gone over the North Star, the Big Dipper and Little Dipper—all the constellations. I could identify them all. But that day the sky was overcast. It was only supposed to be a mile out and a mile back. We'd have to rely on landmarks unless the clouds cleared. I knew I'd be done before it got dark and wouldn't need to use the stars anyway.

But as I walked on that humid July evening, each tree

looked like every other. One bush blended in with the next. Rocky paths meandered this way and that, leaving me so turned around, I could barely tell which way was up.

It was almost ten o'clock at night before I heard the scoutmaster and the other scouts calling for me. The whole way home I had to listen to the boys' teasing—how I couldn't find my way out of a bushel basket and how they were glad my dad had a better sense of direction than I did, or his ship would have never found the shores of Normandy on D-day.

But sitting there on the way home, miserable and stewing in the back of the jostling pickup truck, I had no idea how lost I was soon to be. If I had known about my mom—what would happen to her—what could I have done differently? I don't know that anything would have changed what happened.

Suddenly, I realized the water dripping from my swimsuit was making a small puddle around me. I opened my eyes and ventured past the doorway. The room was warm and hummed with a soft, crackling, airy sound. It seemed like a typical custodian's room, cluttered with all kinds of tools; hammers, pliers, wrenches. Anything you would expect to find in the custodian's quarters, only it was much neater. My dad would have felt right at home. A place for everything and everything in its place.

But as I let my eyes roam around, I noticed things you wouldn't expect. Like a cot, bookshelves, chalkboards filled with numbers, equations, and drawings. Not just any

drawings, but kind of connect-the-dot pictures. A hunter, a scorpion, a crab. And a great bear. I recognized them. They were constellations. The bear was Ursa Major.

There was also a bulletin board with several newspaper clippings tacked up. The headlines read:

BLACK BEAR STALKS THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

LARGEST BLACK BEAR TRACKS ON RECORD

**REWARD FOR KILL OR CAPTURE
OF GREAT APPALACHIAN BEAR**

There was still the sound—airy, like a long breath, only not that. I followed it until I came to an old phonograph with a record spinning on the turntable, but the needle was at the end, making only that rhythmic whispering sound. There was a collection of record albums, all neatly placed on a shelf. I was about to see which record had been playing when I heard a voice from a back corner of the room.

“They don’t know where he’s buried.”

I spun around, gripping the towel about my shoulders. It was Early Auden.

A CONVERSATION WITH CLARE VANDERPOOL



Congratulations on winning the Newbery Medal for *Moon Over Manifest*. What was it like writing your next book, *Navigating Early*, after winning this prestigious award?

It was challenging. Fortunately, I was well into the story before the Newbery was announced. Part of the challenge, even before the Newbery, was just getting acquainted with and really falling in love with these new characters and spending time figuring out the story they have to tell. Of course, winning a Newbery on a first book does come with a certain amount of pressure. I knew the next book would be ripe for comparison. I really had to work at setting aside thoughts of expectations and comparisons and just let the story take its course. Jack and Early are fairly assertive characters and, once I could let go a little, they were more than willing to take the lead.

Where do you find inspiration for your characters and settings?

As far as the inspiration for my characters, I don't know if I'm unusually observant of the real-life

characters around me or if they are just unusually colorful, quirky, interesting, and real, and therefore hard to miss. Either way, I do draw from people I've come across in my own life. Most of my characters are not based on real people, but they usually have some personality traits or mannerisms that I've observed along the way. It could be a family member, a high school teacher, or the guy who bags groceries at the grocery store.

In terms of setting, I'm very rooted in my geography and I have a very strong sense of place. So for me, the setting of any story I write will probably always be significant. *Moon Over Manifest* was very much rooted in Kansas and my grandparents' hometown. The setting for *Navigating Early* is also significant in that Jack is a Kansas boy suddenly uprooted from his home and I wanted to put him in the place that would be most out of his element. So I took this land-locked Kansas kid and placed him in Maine at the edge of the country and the brink of the ocean. Maine was a great location for the story also because the Appalachian Trail runs throughout the state and provided an interesting path for Jack and Early's quest.

What were some of your favorite stories as a young reader?

I was a constant reader and read in a lot of strange places: dressing rooms, math class, church. Some of my favorite books were *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*. I loved mysteries—everything from Nancy Drew to Encyclopedia Brown to Agatha Christie.

What is your writing process typically like? Do you have a set system or routine that works for you?

Writing a book is typically broken up into three different stages that require different locations. First is the Imagining-Dreaming-Wondering stage. When I'm beginning a story I like to spread out a blanket on the floor in my bedroom where I sit with my back up against an ottoman. I have a cup of hot tea in my hand and a dog in my lap and I stare off into space. It looks like I'm doing nothing, but I'm actually in the beginning stages of getting to know my main character and asking him or her a lot of questions. I also have a notebook where I write lots of "what if" questions and start jotting down ideas that begin with, "Maybe . . ."

The second stage is the Crank It Out stage. This requires a good deal of discipline and I usually sit at the dining room table and work on my laptop to avoid the distractions of the desk computer. This stage is a little higher in calories because I get up and down a lot and end up eating too many M & Ms while I'm thinking through a scene.

After I have a draft, there is the Sticky Note stage. I try not to edit too much as I'm writing the first draft so I use sticky notes to mark places that I know I need to go back and fix. It's helpful to go to my sister's garage apartment where I can lay out all my papers and notes and be fairly confident they will not be tampered with during the days and weeks that I'm trying to get rid of all the sticky notes.

The important thing in all three stages is to be open to the element of surprise. It's a wonderful thing when the characters speak up and take the story in a direction I hadn't expected.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not writing?

Besides writing I like to go to the pool with my kids, browse at the bookstore, have a neighbor over for tea, travel, watch reruns of *Monk*, read, have a lot of kids at our house, and go out for dinner with my husband. Life is good.

Have you received any interesting feedback or questions from young readers?

Their letters are always very sweet and sometimes funny. One young boy wrote to me and said that with *Moon Over Manifest* winning a Newbery Award, he was glad that Kansas was now known for something besides tornadoes and basketball. And since Kansas is pretty much the birthplace of basketball, that's a huge compliment.

Do you have any advice for young writers?

My advice sounds a little bit like a recipe for a really rich and hearty soup. You start with a base of lots and lots of reading. Next you throw in a good mix of imagination, playfulness, and observation. Then, for seasoning, you add a dash of this and a pinch of that until you find your own voice and it sounds just right. Then you have to let the whole thing simmer with hours and hours of writing. Like a soup, if you taste it right after you've added all the ingredients, it might not taste very good. Some parts are hard and the flavors are a bit strong, but with lots of writing and simmering, the ingredients blend together and start to take on a texture and flavor that weren't there at first. Give it time and stick with it.