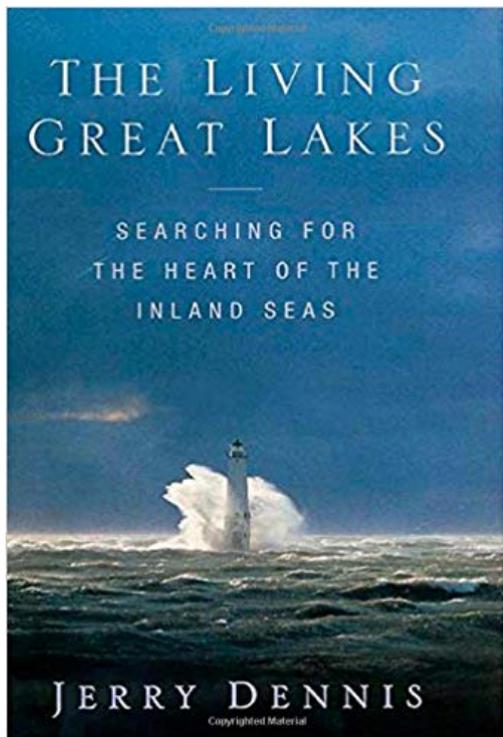


# The Living Great Lakes: Searching for the Heart of the Inland Seas *by* Jerry Dennis



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If fresh water is to be treasured, the Great Lakes are the mother lode. No bodies of water can compare to them. One of them, Superior, is the largest lake on earth, and the five lakes together contain a fifth of the world's supply of standing fresh water. Their ten thousand miles of shoreline bound eight states and a Canadian province and are longer than the entire Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States. Their surface area of 95,000 square miles is greater than New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island combined. People who have never visited them -- who have never seen a squall roar across Superior or the horizon stretch unbroken across Michigan or Huron -- have no idea how big they are. They are so vast that they dominate much of the geography, climate, and history of North America. In one way or another, they affect the lives of tens of millions of people. *The Living Great Lakes* is the most complete book ever written about the history, nature, and science of these remarkable lakes at the heart of North America. From the geological forces that formed them to the industrial atrocities that nearly destroyed them, to the greatest environmental success stories of our time, the lakes are portrayed in all their complexity. The book, however, is much more than just history. It is also the story of the lakes as told by biologists, fishermen, sailors, and others whom the author grew to know while traveling with them on boats and hiking with them on beaches and islands. The book is also the story of a personal journey. It is the narrative of a six-week voyage through the lakes and beyond as a crewmember on a tallmasted schooner, and a memoir of a lifetime spent on and near the lakes. Through storms and fog, on remote shores and city waterfronts, the author explores the five Great Lakes in all seasons and moods and discovers that they and their connecting waters -- including the Erie Canal, the Hudson River, and the East Coast from New York to Maine -- offer a surprising and bountiful view of America. The result is a meditation on nature and our place in the world, a discussion and cautionary tale about the future of water resources, and a celebration of a place that

is both fragile and robust, diverse, rich in history and wildlife, often misunderstood, and worthy of our attention.



## Reviews of the [The Living Great Lakes: Searching for the Heart of the Inland Seas](#) *by* Jerry Dennis

### Unde

[I had the honor of introducing Jerry after studying his work.]

### Jerry Dennis Intro

Those of us who identify as book-lovers, those of us who lived inside stories throughout our childhoods—we know the work of a living legend when we encounter it on the page. Similarly, those of us who have built careers out of the well-shaped sentence, the fully-formed paragraph, the intentionally crafted essay—we know what it’s like to learn from a colleague whose body of work represents a deeply significant contribution.

Today’s Keynote Speaker, Jerry Dennis, is that kind of writer. He has given us work that ignites the imagination, while also infusing it with facts. Woven into his book *The Living Great Lakes*, which is part memoir, part research, part adventure—the facts alone don’t invite story, but they do stay with us long after the final page has been turned—the story that’s there is, indeed, a page-turner. There’s an important kind of intentionality to that approach. We learn as we go along, but we hardly notice that we’re learning.

Whether reading a brief personal essay Jerry published 20 years ago, or a new blog post published last month, his careful focus, smart craft, and generosity of spirit that infuse the page instill readers with a sense of possibility. “You have to open yourself to natural spectacle,” Jerry writes in *The River Home*. “Like a child, you have to be empty of expectation, have to possess eyes that see and ears that hear. It takes practice, like anything. Sometimes you can be surprised.”

Jerry’s writing gives us those eyes and ears, as well as surprise. His place-based work, infused with facts and the imagination, adds up to what I call slow and steady eco-activism. The result is body of work that has brought the Great Lakes Region to life for thousands of readers, above and beyond its residents. His work helps people find a way into caring, into breathing fresh air, and into appreciation of natural resources—even if they aren’t looking for it. Even if they’ve never caught a fish in their lives. Even if they’ve never seen a Great Lake.

If you’re not familiar with his work, I want you to know that Jerry is an internationally acclaimed

author who has earned his living as a freelance writer since 1986. His books, including *A Walk in the Animal Kingdom*, *The Living Great Lakes*, *The Windward Shore*, and *A Place on the Water*, have won numerous awards, have been translated into seven languages, have appeared on national bestseller lists, and are required reading in many universities and colleges. His essays, poems and short fiction have appeared in more than 100 publications, including *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *American Way*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *PANK*, and *Mid-American Review*.

But his bio wasn't always so chalk-full, and his life—as much as we may like to romanticize the life of the writer—is just as busy, exciting, boring, overbooked, full of love, full of confusion, muddled by injustice, and full of uncertainty as the rest of ours.

So what can we learn? After thirty years of making a living as a writer, I won't go so far as to say that Jerry's seen it all, but I will tell you that I invited him to be today's Keynote Speaker with great confidence that he's not going to sugar-coat what he has to tell us. He's seen changes in the publishing industry that impact everyone in this room, and many of those changes, he's seen from more than one angle.

I'm as eager as you are to learn more, and while he won't be reading from his published work today, I hope you'll take the hard facts he's going to share during this presentation and water them with a healthy dose of Great Lakes imagination by reading his books when we're done.

#### **Cordalas**

The author clearly did his technical and historical research on a topic that hit close to home (literally and figuratively) then tied the information together with an engaging and articulate recounting of his journey through the region by sailboat.

Besides being exceptionally informative, it was a more than pleasant read. The author portrayed his shipmates and the voyage in detail that brought his experience to life, without detracting from the subject of the Lakes themselves. Intermingled with the occurrences aboard the *Malabar*, we are introduced to the noteworthy landmarks and occurrences surrounding them.

#### **spark**

Fascinating book drawing on an the adventures aboard a magnificent ship exploring the Great Lakes, and recalling the history of those lakes. This award winning book is a combination of adventure, history, and the possible dangers facing the largest bodies of freshwater in the world.

#### **Shaktiktilar**

"*The Living Great Lakes*" by Jerry Dennis is subtitled "Searching for the Heart of the Inland Seas" and that is an apt description of this engrossing book. It is very easy to see why the *Outdoor Writers of America* named it the "Best Book of 2003". Dennis succeeds in introducing the Great Lakes to you in the same sense that someone introduces special friends to you. You won't just learn about the lakes; you will meet them.

Though Dennis has driven around the lakes (more than once), he takes you through the lakes the only way any explorer can really meet the lakes - by boat, a sailing boat to be precise - and he is a skilled enough writer to make you feel like your reading chair must certainly have been magically transferred to the poop deck.

The Great Lakes, like the other incredible and enigmatic regions here; the Great Plains, the Rockies and Sierras, Appalachia, et al, are a region of amazement and Dennis helps his reader savour that wonder through a very deft and enjoyable immersion.

"The Living Great Lakes" is a hearty brew of history, lake lore, science, ecology, appreciation, sailing adventure, Great Lakes culture, weather wisdom, and Irish wit. Your entertainment is guaranteed.

**elegant stranger**

An pretty amazing book, FULL of information about the Great Lakes-- geological, historical, present day stats. The writing is beautiful but be warned it is very dense! With so much info, it's overwhelming at times and slow going. Still, one of the best books I've come across on the Great Lakes and a must for anyone really interested in learning about this natural wonder.

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