

Patrolling Gitche Gumee

By Herb Evert

For two years aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Mesquite, I plied the cold waters of Hiawatha's Gitche Gumee, Lake Superior. I saw, smelled, tasted, heard and felt her many moods. From mirror-glass calm reflecting sunrises and sunsets to cauldron-like witches' brews of raging waters, roaring winds and towering waves. From rain-washed freshness to dank back-waters. From guiding lighthouses and buoys to fog-enshrouded blindness. From idyllic islands, welcoming coves and harbors to hidden reefs, rocks and shoals just awaiting the next unwary mariner.

I saluted the Edmund Fitzgerald on her proud maiden voyage— and mourned the loss of her and her crew. I inspected and rejoiced with pleasure boaters as they set out on their vacations— and helped rescue some of them from their near-death experiences. I broke ice for lake freighters— and know what it's like to be frozen in.

How this greatest of all the Great Lakes can be so benign, so beautiful, so welcoming one day and so fearsome, so savage, so daunting the next fascinates me even as I return to her year after year to refresh my senses and my soul in her mystic peace and her profound fury. Superior indeed!