

## MAIDENTRIP



**May 22, 2014, 7:00 PM**

- WHERE** Main Street Landing Film House  
60 Lake Street, 3rd floor  
Burlington
- CATEGORY** Burlington Film Society
- FILM TYPE** Documentary
- COST**



### UPCOMING EVENTS



**04/24/2015, 5:00 PM**  
WRIF



**04/30/2015, 11:00 AM**  
Nitrate Picture Show  
George Eastman House



**05/02/2015, 7:00 PM**  
Tierralismo Good Earth Film Tour  
Main Street Landing Film House

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## MAIDENTRIP



### Maidentrip

A film by Jillian Schlesinger

#### A BURLINGTON FILM SOCIETY SCREENING

(FREE for VTIFF Members, [CLICK HERE](#) to find out more about membership)

Documentary / First Run Features / English, Dutch w. English Subtitles / 2013 / 82 Min

Genevieve Jacobs, a professor, psychotherapist, writer and native Vermonter who grew up sailing and boat-building with her parents, will be introducing the film.

Winner Visions Audience Award – 2013 SXSW Film Festival

15-year-old Laura Dekker sets out—camera in hand—on a two-year voyage in pursuit of her dream to be the youngest person ever to sail around the world alone. In the wake of a year-long battle with Dutch authorities that sparked a global storm of media scrutiny, Laura now finds herself far from land, family and unwanted attention, exploring the world in search of freedom, adventure, and distant dreams of her early youth at sea. Jillian Schlesinger's debut feature amplifies Laura's brave, defiant voice through a mix of Laura's own video and voice recordings at sea and intimate vérité footage from locations including the Galapagos Islands, French Polynesia, Australia, and South Africa.

View trailer [HERE](#).

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## BURLINGTON FILM SOCIETY BLOG

### Genevieve Jacobs on Maidentrip

Posted on May 19, 2014



### Genevieve Jacobs on *Maidentrip*, the timeless aspects of voyaging, and the lived and un-lived lives of parents and children

An interview by Barry Snyder, Burlington Film Society Founder

See the film *Maidentrip* Thursday, May 22nd at 7pm, at The Main Street Landing Film House. [More info and tickets here](#)

**Genevieve Jacobs** is in a unique position to comment on the experiences of Laura Dekker, the Dutch teenager whose driving ambition to be the youngest person to sail solo around the world is the subject of the documentary *Maidentrip*. Jacobs, a native Vermonter, grew up sailing with her parents in the waters off Canada, the USA, and England from the tender age of 3, and at age 13 undertook a year-long cruise of the Caribbean that convinced her that sailing was the life for her. From her late teens to early twenties, she logged 30,000 nautical miles off Europe, Africa, and along the Eastern Seaboard. In 1983, she and Claude Desjardins set out from Miami, crossing the Pacific with their home-built 18' sloop and two tuxedo cats, marrying in Tahiti, and dropping anchor in Australia in 1986, with a record-setting ocean passage for micro-yacht long distance speed under sail of 26 days from Galapagos to the Marquesas Islands. It is fair to say Jacobs knows something about the pressure of a passion for sailing that drove Decker to undertake a voyage from Holland to French Polynesia to South Africa and back to St. Maarten.

Upon her return from her own adventures at sea, Jacobs earned an undergraduate degree in Transpersonal Psychology and graduate degree in counseling, and today is a college professor, writer, and psychotherapist. Jacobs' subsequent studies in mythology and depth psychology gave her an additional perspective on the timeless aspects of voyaging and the myriad ways cultures mark the passage from childhood to adulthood. A lifelong student of the literature of sea, Jacobs is also, as she puts it, "indiscriminate" in her eagerness to watch any film that has water or a boat in it, "it doesn't matter whether James Bond or *Breaking the Waves* or *The Love Boat*. In our discussion of *Maidentrip*, the conversation wandered from a discussion of the different forms of wilderness experiences to the joys and risks of sailing to the role of parents in supporting their children's journey into adulthood. We began with Jacobs' general impressions of the film and what it was able to capture about Laura Dekker's experiences.

**GJ:** There's something so elusive and mysterious and impossible to capture about the experience that every creative effort must be appreciated no matter what medium is chosen to try to bring that watery world to shore to us in our living rooms or in our theaters or in a book. It's always inspired great literature: Conrad, Robert Louis Stevenson, Darwin, Melville, Jack London, on and on and on. But I believe, probably, if you get right down to it, every one of them, despite the masterpieces they produced, had a sense of *not* capturing it, a sense that one *can't* bring that massive mystery over from the other world.

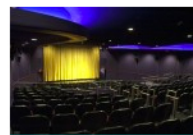
And yet the film did capture some things. I loved the very beginning, for instance. There's just the sounds, the sloshing and the banging. People believe that being on a boat at sea is quiet, but it's incredibly noisy and usually films block that out, in order to have dialogue or whatever. Also, some of the discomfort, the sudden surprising moments of beauty, rising above or transcending all the pain and difficulty—that certainly breaks through. Perhaps some of the loneliness, a very particular kind of loneliness that belongs to the sea and sea voyages. A little bit of sort of existential "what are we here for?"

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There's a poem by Bachelard that talks about waves that ceaselessly, unceasingly built, flop, build again, flop. It's defeat, unlike a journey to the top of the mountain that we've seen in so many beautiful, awesome documentaries about climbing Everest and K-2, where you have a feeling of spiritual triumph. This is not the nature of the ocean passage. It's much more that sort of coming to grips with what (depth psychologist) James Hillman called soul qualities, as opposed to spirit qualities. The highest thing out there at sea, usually, you hope, is your mast, so that verticality involved in mountain conquest, that vertical singular statement of the spiritual achievement, is very different from soul experience, which tends to be repetitive and perhaps, on an emotional level, can feel a little defeating and, shall we say, anti-climactic. And that is part of the beauty and the mystery of it.

**BS:** As a film about ocean-going voyaging and about this particular young person's rite of passage, what do you think the film is missing, or perhaps doesn't get quite right?

**JG:** I think the fact that it was a sponsored trip, that there was an obligation to commercial interests to tell a certain kind of story, and perhaps to gloss over or mask some of the depths and the darker aspects of such a journey, I think that costs some authenticity. I thought there was a great deal hidden or covered or not spoken about.

**BS:** Part of the problem is the question of how to get at those things in a documentary film. The filmmaker, Jillian Schlesinger, wanted Laura's voice to shape the film, so she outfitted the boat with GoPros and gave Laura some questions to contemplate, but left it up to her to decide when and what to film. So it was that decision that may have resulted in the inability to get into those personal depths that you're noticing.

**GJ:** I think Laura may have felt (I don't know, maybe I'm just reading into it) that she may have felt intruded on by the camera and by the camera process. And I also have to say I noticed (maybe this is because I'm getting older) the impact of the MTV, VH1, YouTube music-video generation. Those mannerisms, the moment the camera is on: suddenly there's this loop installed by our culture through social media that this is how you act and look, use gestures, give a sort of a formalized performance. It was fascinating because a sea voyage is where all that falls away. You just shed all those weird mannerisms that speak about your ethnicity, your social-economic background, your tastes in pop culture. In her case, the moment the camera's on, I imagine that, beyond her control, just brought her into: "Oh I'm in an MTV video. This is my stage. What's the music that goes with this? What kind of gestures should I make with my hands? Should I stick my tongue out?" I don't think we had that back in the 70's, before this era. Actually, it would have been much more effective to just leave the cameras on as much as possible, and not attempt to capture anything.

**BS:** The other problem may be that she doesn't seem to be a deeply self-reflective person.

**GJ:** It seems that her motivation is more along the lines of defiance and escape, mainly. A statement: "Take that." An imposition of the will upon the environment and her family. But where do you go after you make that statement? You're in the wilderness. You turn within because there's no mediator anymore. There's only you and the environment. One possibility is boredom, a little mind-numbing, killing boredom: alienation, depression, dissociation.

The alternative, though, is very rich. You begin reading widely and deeply, writing, making music of your own, singing, experimenting with your voice, your breath- a strange, almost primary autism. It's a sort of losing of your civilization, as such- what your customary habits and patterns are about, communication, and just going back to a very childlike and ancient level of consciousness and expression. It's a little bit lunatic but it's a wonderfully creative and artistically rich breeding ground for the imagination. And I don't know if the second leg of Laura's voyage might yield more in that direction; she's very young, and her personality is, *everybody's* personality is, laid bare when sailing. But the internal dialogue- you don't really see the conflict that is inevitable. She must have been having it in her head, but it wasn't coming across without the foil of dialogue with another person, although you saw it with her father and you saw it again with the journalist. There's an unwillingness to talk or to show that, a feeling of being put upon.

But isn't that part of the ineffable quality of any real life-changing experience? Veterans come back from the war, being on a sea voyage. How do you talk about it? How do you bridge this intensely personal experience and bring it across for people who may really want to know? You just cannot. You feel very frustrated. A lot of times people, including veterans, just close down, shut up. They give up.

**BS:** Of course, not everyone who goes through an experience of this sort is called upon to transmit what they take away from that experience. In this case, in terms of a documentary, it's part of the bargain. But the deeper level of what this means to her remains out of view.

**GJ:** It's a huge responsibility. Have you ever had the experience, as a writer, of being forced to expose your work too soon, before you're really finished with it? Your first draft of something, and somehow it's exposed to judgment, eyes, criticism, being consumed, before it's really ripe, before you had the chance to feel that you've done what you've set out to do. I had that feeling. This is a premature exposure of a very intense and ultimately enriching experience. It may have been more challenging for her to handle that end of it, the expressive end, then to do the trip.

**BS:** Some people enjoy that part of it, articulating what the experience meant for them. But strictly speaking, it's not a requirement, is it? Not everyone is interested in taking that extra step.

**GJ:** In a formal sense, no, although these days, as with (solo sailor and author) Tania Aebi, and the other two women who made attempts to set records that are mentioned in the film, the last twenty or thirty years the idea of sponsorship of all kinds of wilderness adventures, has in some ways, I think, corrupted that creative process. It's a pre-emptive interference.

**BS:** Societies put in place these markers for distinguishing when one becomes an adult. In Laura's case, Dutch society has this idea of the need to protect people of younger than legal age, and so the courts initially enjoined the Dekker family in a lawsuit to prevent Laura from making the solo trip. After a year of deliberation the court ruled that the decision was up to her parents, at which point Laura was free to go off on her adventure. But the question of how much we should protect children and how much we should let them make their own decisions, including the decision to engage in potentially dangerous activities, remains.

**GJ:** That's a happening debate across all the cultures. You think of Amsterdam being so free and liberal with drug laws, prostitution, respecting freedoms as fundamental, but lived *within* society, not fringe or marginal or criminalized, but actually incorporated within sophisticated city life. So, in a way, her bid for freedom was legitimized by parental consent, and beyond consent, encouragement<sup>3/4</sup> the father and the mother had to make sacrifices and create a lot of time and attention to create this situation. It's not like she did it all herself. So presumably that's a good send-off. It's not like a runaway who's in the back streets somewhere. It's not so different from parents sending their child off to college a few years early. But we know that that carries risk.

There's several other cases, stories of parents setting out with babies on board, like that unfortunate recent case off the coast of Mexico: very experienced sailors, a beautiful boat, excellent cruising, boat-competent people. But things go wrong and they needed to be rescued and they did the right thing by calling for the rescue. This is one of the difficulties with passage-making and the psychology of sailing: a really deep repugnance for the idea of asking for help. You feel 100% responsible for everything that is humanly claimable as your fault if something goes wrong. So they did the right thing, but they got a lot of flack and many articles went back and forth about it.

I read a comment in a New York Times article about all this that really got my goat. The comment was from the author of a popular book about helicopter parenting, how *not* to parent, about how were over-coddling our children. This author had been asked by the journalist about this situation (of people sailing on the ocean with children on board) and she said "Oh, that's reprehensible. I'm advocating safe risks. Parents should provide safe risks for their children." I was like, "What?!" Life is not Disney. It is not an amusement park ride, cheap thrills, where there's a safety net. That to me is even more frightening than the real thing. If you are getting ready to help your children launch, as you should be in their teen years, to meet the real world, it's very important *not* to create the illusion of safety.

Helen Keller said, "Security, as a whole, is a superstition. Children know this. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." You're either really in it, or you're just messing around and you're going to get badly hurt, because in the back of your mind you're thinking, "Ah, they'll stop the ride." You *can't* get off the boat! There's no getting off and that's life. That's the courage it takes to get married, or the courage it takes to have children, or the courage it takes to change a job or invest in something if you're not sure of the outcome. Who can be sure of the outcome? I don't believe in such a thing as "safe risks," really.

**BS:** Do you yourself have any reservations about a 15-year old girl sailing around the world alone?

**GJ:** To quote my mother, I wouldn't be as worried as much about the time at sea as I would about the time in port. That's a very vulnerable age and the culture of sailors and sailing and foreign ports is very dangerous. You're a babe in the woods, for girls especially, but really for any teenager. To be out there without some protector, without some adult figure who really has your back, and who knows a little about people's motivations and all their wily ways, it's quite risky. I wonder about that and do wonder if that's part of the backstory that was suppressed.

**BS:** She might have had some protection, but we don't know.

**GJ:** Well, that's their privacy. But I think there was an underlying traumatic element that she was carrying all through the film, and I don't know if that originated from the family background history, but it's a very heavy and dark, unspoken burden she was carrying. And that's part of what makes the film poignant.

**BS:** What would you be concerned about, if this was your 15-year-old daughter? Would you give her your permission?

**GJ:** As long as I was confident that the young one had learned basic competencies, and the extremely important competence about getting enough sleep, eating enough food, minding your emotional states, how they're thinking, how they're feeling, those connections. I'd be worried about the ugly chances of slipping overboard, maybe not keeping adequate watch in shipping channels. But those are things you worry about anyway, for anybody of any age. Perhaps a young teenager would be better at that than at my age, where I can trip on a piece of paper going across the floor! They're naturally agile, have great alacrity, more stamina. That's in their favor.

But as the father of two daughters, do you remember back when they were 14, 15, that rebellious, angry ambivalence, maybe one minute fine, wildcat the next, back and forth back and forth. That's difficult for parents. How do you negotiate that so you don't become the enemy? Sometimes as we know—and I'm not saying this is the case in her family, but I certainly know I've had those moments—it's kind of like "I'm signing off! Just get out of here!" That sort of moment where it's "Go see your mother." "Go stay with your father." It's the classic initiation moment in all cultures. Campbell says, "Comes a time when a youth becomes ungovernable." Gets too big for his britches and then the community comes together and gives him an experience that will grow him up good! (laughs) But, how do we do that? Not a safe risk as such, but how to provide enough of an anchor.

The image used by a psychotherapist I like is that a parent's role shifts during those years from that of somebody in the boat rowing the family to that of the perspective of the lighthouse: "Here's the rocks. I'll keep emitting a signal. I'll try to be consistent as I can, no matter what the weather is. But you're the one rowing the boat. Get yourself in or out. Let's hope you don't founder on the rocks. Or if you do, you know how to repair the thing." But you can't go in there and rescue or save the situation really.

But if you look at it historically, people who were thrown on board, shanghaied, whatever, were young, teenagers and younger, nine or ten-year-old cabin boys. And once you get a taste of it, it's very hard to acclimate back. And that's of concern.

This really seals your identity. This is an identity-forming time of life, and if you get into that extreme self-reliance, it can backfire, and really perturb your relationships to the world. You got a chip on your shoulder now. How do you have genuine, respectful respect for people who maybe haven't done the trip you did?

But there is another element in there worth mentioning, another way the commercial aspect of this interfered with the true adventure. I think there is a window of time in which this could be a mature adventure. But it was premature. Perhaps if uppermost in everyone's minds and hearts was growing this child in body mind and soul into the maturity to undertake such a thing with maximum benefit and less risk to the heart, they might have waited a couple of years, might have gotten her more involved with actually fixing, repairing, rebuilding that boat, so there was real blood, sweat, and tears going into the preparation, which is 90% of the whole thing. Once you're on the boat and going a large part of your contentment, your deep gratitude, is because you built this vessel, you feel responsible for the vessel. I'm sorry, but in the film I really got the feeling that she really got plopped on board and set off and it was because she had to make the trip by the time she was 16 or else there wouldn't be a story. That's the commercial hook, but it's an injustice to her and to her voyage, I think. It's just an arbitrary thing, her birthday. So what? Is her voyage any less valuable had she had made it at 17? Would it have been more fantastic if she did it at 12? Who's next? What's next? Someone doing it at 8?

This artificially imposed condition degrades the true value of her adventure. Unfortunately, reality being what is, if not now, when? If she had waited, there might not have been the money to purchase and outfit that boat, and she wouldn't have had the sponsorship. Another young person going out to sail solo isn't news any more.

You can pick up on the resentment that she has. She knows there's something wrong with the idea but she's not sure what. It's a kind of Faustian bargain. She fulfills that commitment and more power to her, because it's really awesome. But

I feel a sense of regret and of somehow strangely having missed the boat in her arrival at the final scene. "Is this it? What?" And that's exactly how it would feel if you did things for the wrong motivations.

**BS:** In many ways it seems like Laura, at the end of the film, is really just at the beginning of her journey. She wants to return to New Zealand, where she grew up. You have the sense that it is a kind of Golden Age in her mind, a time without all the complications of later years.

**GJ:** Mom and dad were together. They were living a dream. And they brought their babies along. She's going to try to redo that, with a better ending this time. And she's doing it with a fella. She's trying to close the loop. And you know, you look at (developmental psychologist Erik) Erikson: with teenagers, it's identity vs. identity confusion. Who am I? And then later, in their twenties, it's intimacy vs. isolation. So now her real journey is how to build, negotiate, cultivate, and protect the actual intimate relationship with another human being. And that's going to be the challenge. It's a big one. More power to her and let's hope that goes well.

**BS:** The film seems to give great importance to the point that she rejects Holland as her home.

**GJ:** I think that's an important point. A lot of people are driven to wilderness experience or solo experience because they already have a feeling of being different, of not belonging, and seeking home; a feeling of having to belong somewhere, perhaps even just within oneself. And the long sea voyage actually separates you even more, more or less permanently. Except for the sailing community, I suppose, but even there, I've meet people with lots of alienation. So there's one point (it's rather sad) where she says, "I don't have a home anymore. I don't belong anywhere. I'm going to try New Zealand and that is my hope, that I'll find a homeland there." This is a process that begins the moment we're born. We're passed off from the mother ship, the mother's body, and we have to start striving, struggling trying to feel close and connected, but also, being on our own. So that's something that I think at that age is a struggle for all teenagers. It's part of what we do with that passage- this incredibly intense loneliness. Who am I? Where are my people? Where is my home? Where do I fit in? Where do I want to fit in? Am I just play-acting at fitting with this group or that group?

But if you're too segregated from society, the chances of sort of washing in and out of different friend groups- are you going to move through that into your twenties with the warmth in the heart that lets you relax and enjoy, or are you always going to have a feeling of being somehow just outside? I'm thinking of Aldous Huxley's *Savage* (a character in *Brave New World*), who grows up on the reservation, and meanwhile, in Happyland, everybody is taking Soma. I think it's that predicament. It's not a particularly comfortable place to be, to come back and look at society and be a very keen critic of what's going on politically, socially. But the whole point of initiation and of all the searching that you do as a teen and the reason you rebel is that you can come back and create a better society for all, for others. So what may start off as a selfish, in a necessarily and healthily narcissistic way, push to birth yourself, brings you back into the human community in a very pro-social way, with new ideas, with new energy, more courage, more confidence, and a fresh outlook and overturn the old shibboleths and things that kept people down.

But unfortunately, my experience with sailing is that rarely happens. I have to be honest about that. It's wildly self-indulgent in a most uncomfortable way out there. The kinds of sacrifices you make—physical comfort, emotional ease—you come back ashore into community and you're being asked to trade off now for different kinds of sacrifices, demands on your time, on your attention. It's hard. And not an awful lot of sailors and people in this lifestyle and many other kinds of traveling lifestyles- any kind of gypsy, nomadic lifestyle, people in their trailers or campers, or on foot, doing journeying or adventuring, people who climb all the mountains in a certain period of time- what's it for? What redeeming aspect does that have for the larger society? What is doing for the world, as my mother used to say to me: Yes, but what are you doing for the world? And at that point in my life, that was all I could do for the world. But I hope I brought it back in my life as an adult.

**BS:** Part of the allure of that community is precisely to get away from society, to not have those responsibilities.

You sail through the Canaries and you don't have to notice or do anything about all the poverty the misery the crime the various social ills because you're sailing out next week. All you have to do is get your rice and bananas, sayonara! So that's a very unfortunate effect. I would call it the tourism effect.

**BS:** What would you want young people coming away from the film to think about?

You know that quote "Whatever you would dream, do it"? With daring comes great blessing. But not to feel anxious that it must be right now or else it will never be. Take a breath. Don't listen to kinds of limitations others would impose on you. Really listen to your heart and home, learn all the skills you could possibly learn to launch yourself on that journey toward your dream with the maximum chances on your side for success. That means you don't just leap without looking. You got to give yourself whatever time is needed, whatever learning experiences are needed, the humility to ask for that, and trust that the way will open to you in its own good time. There's a lot of artificial pressure coming from people with different agendas towards teenagers. Teenagers are always being enlisted to live the un-lived life of older people around them. And it's your life, it's absolutely your life, and you can have some faith and confidence in your ability to find your way into *your* future on your own terms.