

**A review of *Casting Off*, by Libby Purves**

Review by Susan Daniels, volunteer chaplain at St Richard’s Hospice

You may be familiar with Libby Purves from her time presenting *Midweek* on Radio 4. What you may not know is that she is, together with her husband Paul Heiney, also an experienced sailor. This book draws on her experience at sea, but is also a good read about daily family life in a small Home Counties town.

The basic premise is that a few cross words and an impulsive action in response can lead to many unforeseen consequences. Joanna Gurney takes off on impulse in the family sailing boat after a tiff with her husband. She intends to come back after a short trip but finds herself in circumstances which mean she must continue to sail on single-handed in worsening weather. Meanwhile, her frantic husband tries to report her missing and a loose-tongued policeman leaks his story to the press.

The descriptions of family dynamics – such as moody teenagers and husbands who still think the little woman should know her place and duty – are a joy to read and are relatable, as are the accounts of friendships under stress.

It all comes right in the end, but how such events can change lives is very thought-provoking.

As a sailor myself, it is difficult to know how a non-sailor would react to descriptions of the voyage, but I could feel the cold and wet in the words.

So I would definitely recommend this book to anyone with sailing experience who could empathise, but there is also much humour and warmth in the story for all to enjoy.

I have read it twice and enjoyed the second reading as much as the first, seeing new things as I read it over.