

An Interview

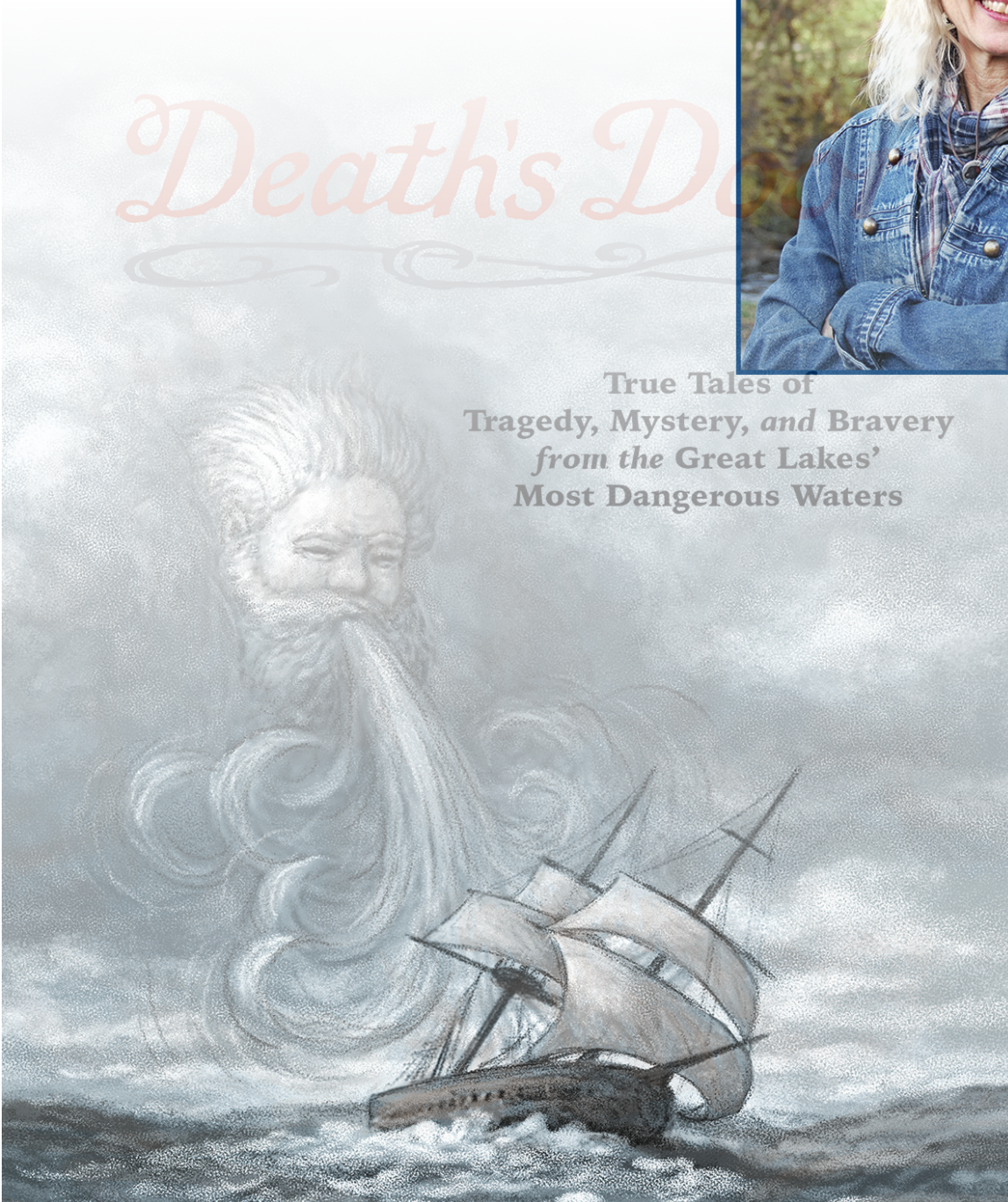
with

Renée Graef



Death's Da

True Tales of
Tragedy, Mystery, and Bravery
from the Great Lakes'
Most Dangerous Waters





WHS Press What attracted you to *Death's Door* as a project that you wanted to be involved with?

The passageway of Death's Door holds mystery, history, and power in its waters. I've always wondered what stories it would tell if it could speak. When the author, Barbara

Joose, brought up the idea of writing the *Death's Door* stories, I immediately said yes to collaborating with her on the book.

Most of the time, publishers contact me about illustrating a book, and not the author. Barb and I have a great working relationship with the Wisconsin Historical Society Press.



WHS Press How did you go about researching the different historical eras portrayed in the book as you developed the look of the characters and settings?

The research was a combination of Barb Joosse's previous information, experts at the Wisconsin Historical Society, and images on Google.



WHS Press Does your process as an illustrator change when you're working on a graphic nonfiction project like *Death's Door* compared to other types of books?

Death's Door is my first graphic novel. Timing is important in a graphic novel—much like a movie. With picture books, the reader spends more time looking at the illustration. Although in both cases, I make an effort to move the viewer's eye around the pages in a logical fashion.





WHS Press *Death's Door* is filled with stories of triumph and tragedy on the Great Lakes. Have you personally had any memorable adventures on the water or on ice?

Nothing compared to what others have experienced! I have visited Washington and Rock Islands and have wonderful memories of my times there.

I remember one particular ride on the ferry to Washington Island. It was a full ferry on a clear day when the waters suddenly churned up. Everyone got out of their cars on the ferry and stood at the edges of the boat, not knowing what to do. The captain cut the engine on the ferry until the weather got a little calmer. A tiny taste of what others experienced!



WHS Press Your illustrations have delighted countless readers over the years. How did you get started as an illustrator of children's literature, and what has been the most surprising or interesting thing you've learned along the way?

I was working as a freelance illustrator in Madison, Wisconsin. A former client gave me the phone number of an entrepreneur who was starting a doll company and needed drawings. I called Pleasant Rowland and started working immediately on her vision

for Pleasant Company/American Girl. I drew the product development boards for the first three characters, Kirsten, Samantha, and Molly, and their accessories. I illustrated my first children's book, *Meet Kirsten*, soon after that.

There have been many interesting and surprising events in my career. I'm amazed at how much serendipity comes into play when pursuing a goal. I have always loved the quote, "Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

