

# Book Club Kit

"Refreshingly different, vivid and immediate. Raymond has an extraordinary gift for description that puts the reader bang in the middle of the action, bang in the middle of its dangerous and endangered world." — M.L. STEDMAN, author of *The Light Between Oceans*

## MY LAST CONTINENT

A NOVEL

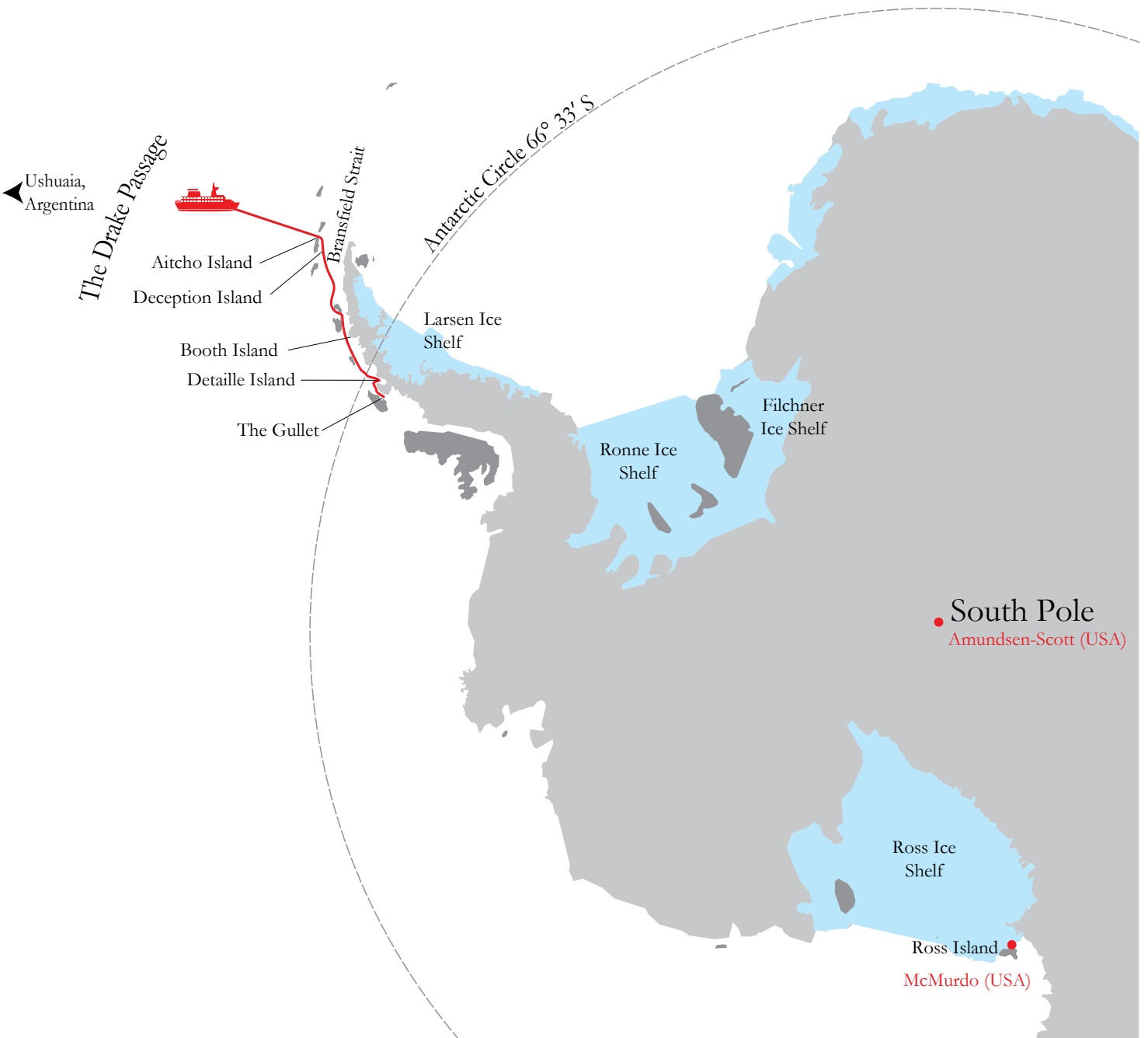
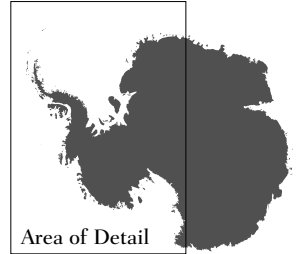
MIDGE  
RAYMOND





# About Antarctica

The continent of Antarctica is about the size of the U.S. and Mexico combined, and nearly twice the size of Australia. Antarctica has no permanent residents, and most travelers to this region visit the Antarctica peninsula, located on the western edge of the continent. Below is a detailed map of the *Cormorant's* journey.





## Suggested Discussion Questions

What parallels do you see between Kate and Richard's relationship, and Deb and Keller's? What traits do Deb and Kate have in common, and what traits, if any, do Keller and Richard share?

Deb observes of Keller, "I know that he's fallen head over heels—not for me but for this continent." How does she reconcile her feelings for him with her knowledge that the continent may always come before her?

What do the nineteenth-century explorers, like Shackleton and Scott, share with contemporary scientists? Other than the obvious technological advances, how are they different?

Deb describes herself as a "rogue scientist." What makes her different from other researchers?

Both Deb and Keller are haunted by their respective pasts. In what ways does the continent provide solace for each of them?

What moments from Deb's childhood led most directly to her ending up working at the bottom of the world?

After reading this book, would you want to travel to Antarctica? How have the characters' challenges with tourism affected your view of travel in this remote environment?

What does Deb mean when she says, of victims and rescuers, "we are one and the same"?



## Q&A with Midge Raymond

**Q: WHAT INSPIRED *MY LAST CONTINENT*?**

A: I was fortunate enough to visit Antarctica a decade ago, on a small expedition vessel very much like the *Cormorant*. The novel grew out of a short story I wrote shortly after that trip. The story, “The Ecstatic Cry,” was inspired after I witnessed a fellow traveler slipping and falling on the ice. He was fine, unlike the man in the story and the novel, but this incident made me wonder what might’ve happened had he been seriously injured because we were at the very bottom of the world, several days away from the nearest trauma center — it’s a sobering thought.

Another thing that stayed on my mind after I left Antarctica was that as tourism increases, the larger cruise ships — those carrying hundreds or even thousands of passengers — are beginning to venture farther and farther south, and this was something the expedition staff on our smaller vessel expressed concern about: If something were to happen to a large ship carrying more than a thousand passengers, it would be very challenging to rescue everyone because it’s such a remote area.

Sure enough, in 2007, a small cruise ship collided with an iceberg in Antarctica and sank within 14 hours — in this case, all involved were fortunate because the weather was calm and another cruise ship was nearby to help with rescue efforts. Had circumstances been different, however, this incident could’ve had a much more serious outcome.

Ultimately, I was inspired to write this novel because I’m passionate about the continent and

all its majestic creatures, and I hope the more we get to know its beauty, the more inspired we’ll be to ensure that Antarctica stays healthy. Almost 98 percent of Antarctica is covered with ice, and in a rapidly warming climate, the health of the planet as a whole depends very much on the health of this continent.

**Q: WHAT SORT OF RESEARCH DID YOU DO TO WRITE THIS NOVEL?**

A: I think I’d have had a hard time capturing Antarctica without having seen it firsthand — it is unlike any other place I’ve been. Like most travelers, however, I only visited the peninsula, so I had to research and imagine the rest. I did a great deal of reading and watched many documentaries to get a feel for what the rest of the continent is like, since it’s very different from the islands. A wonderful resource for me, for both science as well as life at McMurdo Station, was [The Antarctic Sun](#), an online publication of the U.S. Antarctic Program.

I also had the good fortune to volunteer with the University of Washington’s Penguin Sentinels program, where I counted penguins at the Punta Tombo colony in the Patagonia region of Argentina. This experience taught me so much about penguins, and of course I fell madly in love with them, which helped me create and understand Deb’s character. And the Magellanic colony where we worked was where I met Turbo, the real-life penguin who inspired the character of Admiral Byrd.



## Q&A with Midge Raymond

**Q: HOW DID YOU DECIDE ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL?**

A: In early drafts, I experimented a lot with structure, as well as point of view. I wrote many drafts of the book that incorporated several characters' points of view, which helped me get to know all of these characters well, but ultimately I realized that this is Deb's story.

I wanted to bring in the shipwreck at the beginning, to propel the story forward — and from there, I returned to the first day of the expedition and created a linear timeline for that journey. The glimpses into Deb's past — her childhood, finding her way in the scientific community, and her relationship with Keller — were woven into the story, with each step back in time building on what was happening in the present narrative. It was both fun and challenging to juggle all this at times, especially since with each revision, I'd have to step back and look at the whole again to be sure it all aligned the way it should. I wrote endless timelines and outlines — and was extremely fortunate to have wonderful readers, copyeditors, and proofreaders along the way.

**Q: YOUR CHARACTERS ARE CONFLICTED OVER TOURISM AND ANTARCTICA. ARE YOU AS WELL?**

A: Very. On one hand, visiting Antarctica was life-changing for me, and if everyone who visits can come away with the same love for the continent and an understanding of the challenges it faces, I think it's worthwhile — sometimes the best way to educate people is to show them firsthand what's at stake. On the other hand, there is a lot of Antarctic

tourism that is not educational — such as ski trips and ice marathons — and this sort of tourism is not at all healthy for such a fragile environment, in my opinion. There are plenty of places to ski and run, but no other place to see Adélie penguins or Weddell seals, so tourism needs to be carefully managed and environmentally sound.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR WRITING PROCESS LIKE?**

A: I have no specific writing process, which I know sounds unusual, as so many writers have solid writing routines. Perhaps it's my journalistic background, but I simply write whenever I can, as often as I can. I have a hard time maintaining a daily schedule, so in order to make good progress on a project, I try to do a residency every year — *My Last Continent* would still be a work in progress without the Helen Riaboff Whiteley Center, where I had several uninterrupted weeks over three years to work on the manuscript. Otherwise, I'm usually in one of two modes: information gathering, during which I carry around a notebook and scribble in it whenever and wherever I can; and writing mode, during which I usually need to take myself to the university library, where I turn off my phone and wi-fi — the only way, I've learned, to get anything done.



# Meet the Penguins

There are seventeen species of penguin in the world, four of which you'll meet in *My Last Continent*: the three Antarctic species (Adélie, chinstrap, and gentoo penguins), and the Magellanic penguins of Argentina. Many penguin species are vulnerable due to climate change, pollution, and the fishing industry—see the following page for resources where you can find more information and learn how to help these wonderful creatures.



Above are three gentoo penguins on the Antarctic peninsula. Penguins nest on rocks, and they often climb to significant heights to build their nests.



This penguin to the right is an Adélie, named for the wife of the French explorer who led the expedition where this bird was discovered.

The penguins to the right are chinstraps, named for the little black line on the underside of their chins, and they are the smallest of the brush-tailed Antarctic penguins.





# Meet the Penguins



Above are Magellanic penguins at Punta Tombo, Argentina, the largest Magellanic colony in the world.



This is the author with Turbo, who inspired the penguin in the novel, *Admiral Byrd*. Turbo is a fixture around the research station at Punta Tombo; he has never been fed but he loves humans and, at the time of this writing, has still not chosen a mate. He is believed to be about 12 years old.

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## To learn more...

### READ

*Penguins: Natural History and Conservation*, edited by  
Pablo Garcia Borboroglu and P. Dee Boersma

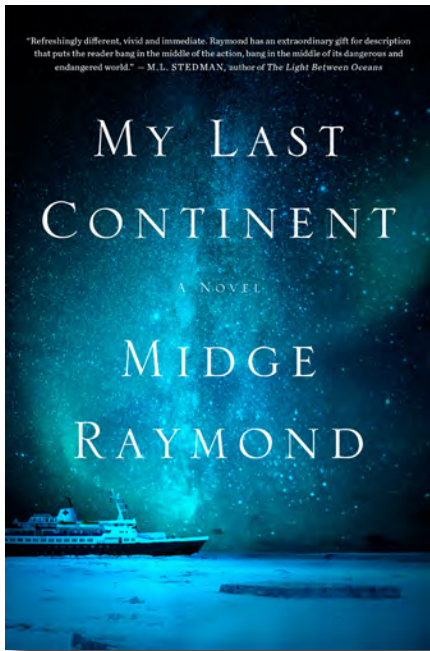
### VISIT

[www.GlobalPenguinSociety.org](http://www.GlobalPenguinSociety.org)  
[www.PenguinStudies.org](http://www.PenguinStudies.org)  
[www.Oceanites.org](http://www.Oceanites.org)

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## Praise for *My Last Continent*



Scribner

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“There is a romance about faraway, desperate places, about isolation, about ice and snow. Add penguins and you have Midge Raymond’s elegant *My Last Continent*, a love story about the Antarctic and the creatures, humans included, who are at home there. Half adventure, half elegy, and wholly recommended.”

— Karen Joy Fowler, author of *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*

“*My Last Continent* feels refreshingly different, vivid and immediate. Midge Raymond has an extraordinary gift for description that puts the reader bang in the middle of the action, bang in the middle of its dangerous and endangered world. Her clean, spare prose pulls us irresistibly into the story and the wider issues it raises. She is clearly a writer in command of her craft.”

— M.L. Stedman, author of *The Light Between Oceans*

“*My Last Continent* is an original and entirely authentic love story. It is a love triangle with Antarctica as the third party, literally and metaphorically. Midge Raymond takes us, physically and emotionally, into an unfamiliar world—a world that has much to teach us. She deftly interweaves a compelling drama with a gentle and subtle love story. It’s a mature novel, one that recognizes that love is seldom simple or exclusive, and that the things that bring us together can also keep us apart.”

— Graeme Simsion, author of *The Rosie Project* and *The Rosie Effect*





## About the Author



Midge Raymond is the author of the short-story collection *Forgetting English*, which received the Spokane Prize for Short Fiction, and the novel *My Last Continent*. Her writing has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *American Literary Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, the *Los Angeles Times* magazine, *Poets & Writers*, and many other publications.

Midge worked in publishing in New York before moving to Boston, where she taught communication writing at Boston University for six years. She has taught creative writing at Boston's Grub Street Writers, Seattle's Richard Hugo House, and San Diego Writers, Ink. She has also published two books for writers, *Everyday Writing* and *Everyday Book Marketing*.

Midge now lives in the Pacific Northwest, where she is co-founder of the boutique publisher [Ashland Creek Press](#), which specializes in literature about the environment and animal protection.